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OR,

APACHE JACK'S WHITE TRAIL.

"A Tale of the Land of Silence."

BY FREDERICK DEWEY.

CHAPTER I.

LOST IN THE DESERT.

It was a hot day in one of the hottest regions of North America—that part lying between the two great rivers, Colorado and the Rio Grande, that noon found a curious party at rest on the vast, barren plain known to roaming Indians and hunters as the "Land of Silence."

And it was a land of silence, its endless quiet and monotony never varied save by an occasional flock of vultures winging far aloft. Nothing relieved the sterility and monotonous level of this vast expanse, save now and then a slight

"THE DOG! THE TANGEMUND! KEEP HIM OFF!" APACHE JACK SHOUTED, AND SPRUNG IN FRONT OF THE OUTLAW RANGER. PEDRO AND DAY WERE BY HIS SIDE IN A MOMENT, WITH CLUBBED GUNS.

elevation or mound, and these hillocks only served to make the dreary level more apparent.

So thought the travelers, as in the scanty shade their wagons afforded, they ate their noonday meal, gloomily and in silence. The mules were free to roam at will, but they did not leave the wagons, but eyed their masters' water-vessels wistfully, waiting for their share, which, however scant, would serve to moisten their dust-inflamed throats.

The party was small, numbering about thirteen persons. Four of these were Mexicans; an old man, his daughter, and two attendants, men who had spent their lives in the senor's service.

They were escorted by the remainder; soldiers of the United States. Two of these were officers; a lieutenant and sergeant. The other seven were privates and attended to camp duties, drove the wagons (of which there were five) and stood guard; for though in the "Land of Silence," strange as it may seem, guards were needed.

The old man was Senor Martinez, owner of the most extensive hacienda in northern Mexico.

Full fifty years of age, he was as elastic and buoyant as decades since, and he was now, in the wilderness, the real commander of the party.

The daughter was a beautiful girl, just budding into womanhood, the idol of her parent, and the divinity of the rough soldiers, who would die for her. She was of medium height, with clear complexion and magnificent hair falling in sable waves over her well-rounded shoulders, and confined at the crown with a clasp of amethyst. Her eyes were dark and wondrously beautiful in their ever-varying expressions. Her dress was in keeping with her comely appearance. Her neat-fitting riding-habit was of expensive material but plain, and in excellent taste, its dark folds contrasting well with the pure white of her favorite pony, the envy of many a senorita.

No plebeian was Senorita Isidore; in station and wealth she was high. The daughter of Senor Martinez, she inherited wealth and riches and of the greatest in Mexico.

If Isidore Martinez was of rank and wealth, why was she here in this burning wilderness, listening with anxious face to her father's servant, Pedro Felipe, as he spoke words which caused the senor's face to cloud with vexation? These are the words which caused Isidore's uneasiness:

"You say, then, Pedro, it is useless to advance?"

"Yes, senor. We have lost the way."

"You have well searched the vicinity for the lost trail?"

"Yes, senor."

"You took the return track to discover where we left it?"

"Senor, I found the trail. It ended where we left it. It was a blind trail."

"That will do, Pedro. Bring the young officer."

Pedro bowed and walked toward a distant wagon, and the senor was left to his own reflections.

They were uneasy ones. He was a man of large experience and accustomed to painful situations, but of all dilemmas in which he had been placed, this was the worst. He had been heavily plunged into debt, and ruin had lately stared him in the face.

But at an opportune time for him, his brother, the wealthy Don Carlos of California, had died, leaving his vast fortune solely to his brother. The hacienda had been heavily mortgaged, and in two months was to be sold under the hammer.

In order to avert the calamity, he was obliged to go to San Diego, his brother's late residence, and return before the mortgage expired. Four months was a short time for that journey, and here he was, stopped almost at the start; lost. Can you wonder now that he was uneasy and alarmed?

Lieutenant Craver approached, and saw the discouraged expression of the senor's face. He addressed him in a low tone:

"You desired my presence, senor?"

The old man started at the voice, and an expression of relief lightened his weary features.

"Ah! lieutenant."

"You appear troubled, senor."

"I am troubled, sir. I wish to ask your advice."

He arose and took the young man's arm, and earnestly talking, they wandered out on the hot, sandy plain, the officer smoking his cigarette.

He was a handsome, self-reliant young man, tall and muscular. His face was frank and open

and bronzed by the sun. His decided mouth and square chin expressed resolution, and his blue eyes shone with as yet untried fearlessness.

He was a model officer. So thought Isidore, and her judgment rarely failed in its opinion.

Pedro and Benedento, smoking under their wagons, were alarmed at the expression of the senor's face, and indulged in many surmises as to the cause.

Isidore also noticed it, and her woman's heart longed to comfort him. She would when he returned, and Cra—the officer had gone away.

The sun left the meridian on its downward course; the soldiers dozed in the shade of the wagons; Isidore paced the parched plain regardless of the burning glare of the sun; the mules, lazily grouped, stolidly twitched their ears and dozed, and the two men out on the plain moved further away; all was quiet in the Land of Silence.

One of the dozing men on shifting his position, suddenly shouted and started to his feet, with eyes distended and his whole being expressing terror. His cry aroused his companions and they sprang to their feet and gazed at him astonished.

He was wildly glaring around him as if in expectation of seeing some horrible object. The soldiers examined the plain. Nothing was to be seen save the two men still out on the sands.

They turned and questioned him. He was Sergeant Dare, a veteran of tried courage.

He paid no attention to their questions, but sighed heavily, and pressing his hands together, stood as if stupefied.

"What was it, sergeant?" asked private Hicks.

Dare sighed heavily and walked slowly away.

Mechanically filling his pipe, he returned to his seat, and smoked rapidly, with a frightened, nervous look in his eyes. To the men's pressing inquiries he only shook his head slowly. Astonished, they returned to the shade of the wagons, discussing his strange actions. After many conjectures, Day, a war-tried veteran, spoke for the first time.

"Boys, it don't surprise me at all. I've kept my eyes open lately, and it's my opinion we'll see mighty strange things 'fore we git to California."

"What do you mean, Day?" asked private Hicks.

"Boys," and the veteran's voice sunk to a whisper, "this is the 'Land of Silence.'"

He turned away and glanced at Dare. Slowly the sun sunk to the west; slowly the two forms out on the plain drew nearer; the camp was quiet, and Isidore was asleep in her wagon; but Sergeant Dare still sat with his face buried in his hands, and his empty pipe lay at his feet. What was the matter with Sergeant Dare?

The senor and Craver paced the sands all the hot afternoon, and returned weary and disheartened, though with a settled plan.

It was this: to dispatch Pedro and Benedento to the Rio Grande for a guide, without which they should never have started. To do this would require a week at least. The senor groaned as he entered his wagon:

"Seven more precious days lying idle on this accursed plain."

A sudden commotion among the soldiers drew his attention, and he dismounted from the wagon and looked about him. A man was coming at a gallop, afar out on the plain. All eyes earnestly regarded him as he steadily approached, rising and falling with his horse, gradually becoming more distinct. Many questions arose as to who he was, and why he should be riding alone in this trackless wilderness. Was he an Indian? No. As he drew near they could see he was a white man, though his face was deeply bronzed by wind and sun.

As he approached he slackened his pace and advanced at a fast walk, the horse panting heavily.

He rode silently by the group of soldiers, eying them sharply, and dismounted and addressed the senor:

"This is Senor Martinez, I believe," and he cast a searching glance at him.

The senor replied in the affirmative.

"I am Captain Hart."

"Indeed? I have heard of him often. You wish to see me on business?"

Hart replied that he was en route to the Colorado, and had heard that the party was going in the same direction. As the Apaches were hostile and on the war-trail, he would beg leave to accompany the party. The senor cordially bade him welcome, and invited him to supper, which was then ready. While he is eating, let us glance at him.

He was above the medium height, lean and sinewy, with a dark complexion and piercing sinister eye, which was never at rest, but constantly glancing, as if in momentary suspicion.

His cheek-bones were high, his nose aquiline, and the mouth straight, with thin, colorless lips. Emphatically he was not a handsome man. His clothing was of buckskin, and fitted tightly. He wore a short, fancifully-decorated jacket and leggings, and a pair of heavy boots, on which were strapped a pair of huge steel spurs. His head was surmounted by a peaked sombrero, in the band of which a black feather nodded and waved. It was once the property of the black buzzard, and was a suspicious-looking plume. Across his back was slung a carbine, and his belt contained several pistols and a wicked-looking knife. These, with his horse, a powerful black, complete the man.

Altogether, his general air is suspicious, and many dark tales have been told of Captain Hart and his band of rangers and this story will show whether the man was misjudged.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUARREL.

NIGHT had come, and the camp-fires were blazing, the guards were posted, and the joke and song went round. There were three fires.

One, the senor's, sacred from intrusion by his daughter's presence; the other two belonged to Craver and his men, one being the private retreat of the lieutenant and his sergeant while the other was a huge bonfire, around which clustered the soldiers and Pedro and Benedento.

It is not with these latter fires we are interested to-night, but in one by itself—the senor's.

Around this fire were three persons holding a council—the senor, the lieutenant and the ranger captain, Isidore having retired to rest. Craver and the ranger were on opposite sides of the fire, each resolving within himself to hold no unnecessary communication with the other.

From the first they had disliked each other—why, they could not tell. The senor was speaking.

"Then, captain, you propose to accompany us to San Diego?"

"Only as far as the Colorado, senor."

"You are acquainted with the route?"

"Perfectly, senor."

"Then we may push on at once. Lieutenant, we have a guide now," joyfully spoke he, all his despondency vanishing at once.

The ranger stared.

"What! have you no guide?"

"No!"

And the senor related their dismay at losing the trail, of which the reader is already acquainted. A sudden gleam overspread Hart's countenance.

"The way is plain enough to me," he said, apparently musing. The senor was overjoyed.

"Are there any landmarks?" inquired Craver.

"Plenty!"

"What are they?"

The ranger affected not to hear. Craver repeated the question.

"I know them, sir," Hart vouchsafed no other reply.

The lieutenant's face flushed.

"It were better, sir, that we knew them, in case of any accident happening to you."

Hart replied, insolently:

"Well, if you are so nervous about accidents, here they are; twelve hours' journey in a south-westerly course will bring you to the Skeleton Buttes, which continue in a chain nearly to the Colorado. All you have to do is to follow them."

"That's a lie, Cap Hart!" growled a deep voice behind him in the darkness.

The ranger sprang to his feet and drew his revolver.

"Who tells me I lie?" he yelled, cocking the revolver.

The lieutenant stirred the fire and it flamed brightly.

By the bright light the ranger could see his challenger. He was a man, a giant in proportions, quietly sighting along the barrel of a huge rifle which was aimed at the ranger's head.

"Drop that revolver!" growled the stranger.

"Who are you?" defiantly asked Hart.

"Drop that revolver and sot down, or ye may drop down."

The stranger's gray eyes snapped dangerously, and he steadily glanced across his ivory sights.

Hart sullenly obeyed. The stranger lowered his huge weapon and advanced to the fire.

He was a giant, dressed in the garb of a hunter, and a long tress of coal-black hair dangled from his rifle.

"Apache Jack!" yelled Hart, springing to his feet in alarm.

"Yes, Apache Jack!" reiterated the newcomer. "Yer seem narvous, Cap Hart."

"I thought you were dead and scalped, long ago."

"Nary time," chuckled the giant, whom we shall call by name Apache Jack.

"What do you mean by telling me I lie?" asked the ranger, with a glimmer of bravado.

"Bekase yer do!"

Hart's hand moved slowly toward his belt. The quick eye of the scout noticed the movement, and his eyes snapped.

"Jest draw it! I dare ye to! Ef ye ever so much as cock it, the buzzards will be a-pecking ye before twelve hours." And his eyes glittered and his mouth and chin settled into an expression of resolution. Hart slowly withdrew his hand from his belt.

The senior, who had been astounded by the sudden quarrel and mysterious appearance of the scout, now interposed.

"Who are you that appear so mysteriously, and breed discord by insulting one of our party without provocation?"

"Senor Martinez, ye kain't insult thet feller."

The senior was astounded. Who was this strange man that he knew every one? He continued:

"The captain is of our party, sir, and as its leader, I have a right to demand why you provoke him without cause."

"I hed cause, senor."

"Then let me hear it, and if possible terminate this unhappy wrangle."

"Wal, then, he war tryin' to mislead ye."

"You are a liar!" snarled Hart, his rage overcoming his judgment.

The whole demeanor of Apache Jack changed in an instant. Like lightning his rifle flew to his shoulder, and before Hart could draw his revolver the rifle was staring him in the face with its yawning muzzle.

"Take it back! take it back, ye coyote, or by the heavens I'll drop yer in yer tracks!"

Hart hesitated.

"I'll give ye more than ye deserve. I'll count six, and then—One!"

The soldiers, drawn to the spot by the uproar, could see the finger press hard on the trigger and they held their breath in suspense, alternately gazing at the combatants.

Craver sprung between them.

"Hold!" he shouted. "Don't shoot! Sergeant Dare, draw the men in line with muskets ready to fire."

In a twinkling the veterans filed into place. It was an exciting scene. The scout was endeavoring to elude Craver and bring his weapon to bear on the defiant ranger. The senior stood by, astounded. Isidore was trembling between the Mexicans. Craver was trying to soothe the enraged scout.

"Two!"

There was an intense silence as the scout counted.

"Three!"

And with the activity of a cat he sprung by the lieutenant, and the sights were again on the ranger.

"Four! Five!"

"Stop!" screamed Hart, dropping on his knees.

The soldiers aimed their pieces at the two men.

"Si—!"

"I knuckle! Oh, God! don't fire!"

It was over. The soldiers brought their muskets to the shoulder, and the sergeant growled:

"Order—arms!"

Down came the muskets. Apache Jack lowered his rifle and turned toward Craver.

"Leftenint, you air a fine young man. But, by the Eternal! no man blocks my game. Ef ye hadn't saved my life oncet, ye'd ha' b'en a dead man now."

Craver was astonished. When had he saved Apache Jack's life? He had never seen him before. He looked inquiringly at the scout.

Apache Jack noticed his gaze.

"I'll tell ye bimeby," and he sat down by the fire.

The excitement was over and the soldiers dispersed, and the fire shed its light now on four persons; Apache Jack making the fourth.

The ranger was earnestly whispering with the senior, whose face was ominously dark.

Isidore, who had been attracted by the confusion, returned to the wagon and peeped out. She could both hear and see Craver and the

scout, who were talking by the fire, the scout never taking his eyes from Captain Hart.

"How do you know me? when did I save your life?" eagerly questioned Craver.

Apache Jack smiled.

"Wal, I know every man in this kentry, and seein' thar ain't but a few, it ain't sech a hard matter ter bekime acquainted. D'ye remember when a man kim ter the fort, sick and miserable, and ye ordered the doctor ter tek good keer of him until he rekivered? Wal, I'm thet chap. Ef it hadn't b'en fer yer orders, I reckin I'd ha' gi'n out."

Craver recollected the circumstance. He had not only ordered the surgeon to attend to the sick man, but had sent him delicacies from his own mess, of which the scout was not aware.

"What did you mean by saying Hart was trying to mislead us?"

"Wal, jest repeat what the skunk said."

"He said, 'twelve hours' journey in a south-westerly course would bring us to Skeleton Buttes.'"

"Thet's a lie, and he knows it! Twenty-four hours' ride ter the northwest will bring ye to the Buttes, and a year's ride in any other direction won't take ye anywhars nigh 'em."

"Are ye sure?"

Apache Jack glanced at him in pity.

"How long ye b'en in this kentry?"

"I came from Fort Leavenworth three months ago."

"Thet counts fer yer never hearing of Apache Jack. Why, boy, thar ain't a rock or tree fer miles that I kain't put my finger on in the blackest night ever made!"

He sunk into abstraction, now and then gazing suspiciously at Hart, who was still holding an earnest conversation with the senior. He seemed intently thinking over something as he now and then uttered a low exclamation.

Isidore, peeping through the wagon-cap, heard something that made her heart beat faster and her eyes sparkle, as the scout suddenly spoke:

"Thar's a feemale in the outfit, ain't thar?"

"Yes, the senor's daughter Isidore."

"Isidore! a right purty name. And a right purty gal, too?"

"She is the prettiest, best—"

"Soho!" and Apache Jack grinned.

The young man blushed.

"That's the way the land lays, then. Soho!"

And Apache Jack grinned harder than ever.

Isidore saw the young man's embarrassment, and her heart beat fast. Her tender Mexican emotions had pictured the lieutenant as a hero, and she had many times blushed as she caught herself wondering whether he cared for her. And now a sweet thrill succeeded the anxious doubt, and she crept to bed, blushing and smiling. Dear lieutenant!

And then her woman's caprices veered around and she pouted prettily. He had not come near her all that day. On the morrow she would show the lieutenant how little his absence affected her. Ugly lieutenant!

Apache Jack continued to study, and at last he again spoke:

"Is thar any money in the outfit?"

Craver did not know. He only knew the senior was wealthy.

The scout bent over and whispered a few words in his ear.

The young man started.

"The villain!" he muttered, clinching his revolver tightly. "If he dares touch Isidore—"

"Hush!" cautioned the scout. "Thar they kim."

The senior and Hart returned closer to the fire and lighted their cigarettes. Craver and Apache Jack remained silent.

Sergeant Dare, in making the rounds of the camp that night, saw something which caused him to shudder and tremble from head to foot. When he returned to the fire, his companion saw he was alarmed and frightened, and he went about as one in a trance. This was the second time he had acted so unaccountably, and they looked inquiringly from one to another.

"What is the matter with the sergeant?"

A voice was heard out on the plain, calling him by name. Again and again it rung out in the darkness:

"Sergeant Dare! Sergeant Dare!"

John Day, the veteran, touched him gently.

"Sarge'nt, some one's calling you."

He started violently and appeared unnerved.

The voice called again:

"Sergeant Dare!"

He arose and walked toward the voice.

It was one of the sentinels—Hicks. He was

nervously peering about him in the darkness, and his face wore a terrified expression.

"Sergeant," he huskily whispered, "I just now saw the fearfulest—"

The sergeant put his hand over the man's mouth, and Hicks felt it tremble.

"What was it?" he whispered, taking his hand from Hicks's mouth and placing both hands on his shoulders.

Hicks whispered a single word in his ear.

The sergeant turned as one bereft of his senses, and staggered away.

Suddenly he turned.

"Don't tell a soul," he whispered, and crept toward the fire, leaving the frightened sentinel alone with the rising moon and the torture of the thought of once again seeing that fearful object.

What is the matter with private Hicks and Sergeant Dare?

CHAPTER III.

THE DESERT RANGERS.

ABOUT midnight one of the sentinels was startled at hearing a hoof-stroke behind him. He turned and saw a man enveloped in a heavy blanket, mounted on a large horse, beckoning to him. He advanced, and the horseman spoke:

"Hush! I am Captain Hart. I want to ride about twenty miles and back before dawn. You know I had a quarrel last night with Apache Jack about a certain matter in which I am now going to prove I am right."

He leaned over and dropped some money in the man's hand.

"And you need say nothing about this."

He struck spurs to his horse and galloped away. The man stood still, watching him as he rapidly disappeared. The incident had passed so quickly that he scarcely heard Hart speak before he was swiftly receding. Evidently he did not like the looks of the affair, as he grumbled audibly:

"I wish I had never entered this accursed country. He took me so by surprise I didn't know what I was doing when I let him by."

"Cuss him! He looked as black as a thundercloud and twice as surly. I know him of old. He don't mean any good stealing away in the night so. The cunning coyote! He bought my silence with his cursed money. I'll give it back to-morrow, and tell the lieutenant."

While he thus muttered, Hart was galloping over the moonlit plain, cursing and vowing revenge on Apache Jack. The coyotes sat on the sand-hills, keenly watching him; the gray mountain wolf, as he trotted boldly in the bright moonlight, eyed him with a gleaming eye and shining teeth and howled; but he noticed nothing but a minute speck afar off in the dim horizon.

The wolf again howled and followed in a gallop. Another joined him. More dusky forms added to the pack, and soon he was steadily pursued by a score. But he still noticed nothing but the speck, now grown to a blot, and cursed Apache Jack, and galloped faster.

He looked to his pistols. "Perhaps I may use them to-night," he muttered. "The Apaches are on the war-trail—hark!"

He drew rein suddenly, curbing his horse back on his haunches as a low, mournful wail floated to his ears. He looked eagerly around, but he was alone in the moonlight. He turned to resume his gallop.

Again that prolonged cry, dim, as from a distance, floated vaguely out in the weird night air. His eye fell on the wolves sitting on their hams a short distance in his rear.

He drew a breath of relief, and then his face and head sunk.

"It was miles away, and not the howl of a wolf either." And he sat with drooping head, intently thinking. Half an hour passed and still he sat in his saddle, absorbed in thought, and muttering disjointedly. The wolves circled round and round, skulking and licking their chops, their gleaming eyes fastened on the quiet ranger.

Coyotes drew near, and at a safe distance eagerly watched the proceedings, sitting on their tails.

A prairie-owl wheeling above eyed them all: ranger and horse, wolves and coyotes.

All this time something dark and massive galloped toward the silent group in the moonlight, steadily following the ranger's trail.

A few minutes passed. The group had slightly changed in position. The ranger had fallen into a semi-stupor, the wolves were closer, and the coyotes had bravely drawn near. The owl, instead of wheeling, was still poised above the ranger, but not looking at him.

Far from it. Something strange had drawn his attention back on the ranger's trail, something with red eyes and gleaming teeth, pattering swiftly on, snuffing the trail. And still the ranger sat unconscious of wolves, coyotes, or the stranger galloping in the rear.

But not long. Something in the action of the beasts about him caused him to stare around in alarm. The coyotes had disappeared. The wolves were slowly retreating, gnashing their teeth and snarling, and the owl was swooping and dashing, screaming discordantly. He peered and listened. Nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard, but the retreating wolves and the owl with its harsh screams.

A tuneful, mournful sound pealed out into startling distinctness, close behind. Hart trembled and rocked in his saddle, wholly devoid of the use of his limbs, and moaned in terror.

The horse was affrighted too, and pranced and stamped, awaiting with a shudder the signal to start.

It did not come.

Again that sound pealed out, this time with a ring of triumph, and ending with a savage growl. The ranger shrieked and plied the spur, though the terror-stricken horse would have flown without it. For well he knew that sound, too many times had he galloped for life, before it. And the ranger, as he heard that sound, felt the warning of his doom. He hurriedly questioned himself, trying in vain to call his pursuers Indians, ghosts, any thing but the reality.

"Apaches? No. Wolves? No. What then?" As he groaned the answer, the drops of icy sweat swiftly rolled down his face and started from every pore.

"The Tangemund!"

It was quite near now, and Hart could fancy he heard the quick panting breath of his terrible pursuer. But he still spurred the horse, and the horse still flew on.

The blot far ahead was a blur now, and the heart of the ranger rose. But still he spurred on.

He neared the blur, which was now a distinct mound, looming solitary from the level plain. A faint sound came from the rear, and Hart drew a breath of relief.

"Distanced! Coward, not to remember that nothing in the desert can overtake Avalanche!"

But he waited not to talk. Very soon the untiring Avenger would stand here in this spot, and then—?

He glanced anxiously behind and continued his gallop, and approached the hill.

A deep shadow lay on one side of it, and stretched away into the plain for some distance.

Into this shadow he boldly plunged, as if well acquainted with the locality, and rode to the further end of the mound. Here he halted, and after intently listening and peering out into the moonlit plain, he drew a golden whistle from his pocket and whistled, once softly, twice sharply. Then he waited a moment and blew a loud blast.

As if by magic, five shadowy horsemen appeared on the plain, riding slowly toward him. He was not alarmed. This was but one of many such meetings, and he calmly lighted a cigarette, of which he constantly kept a store.

The horsemen approached silently. When they had arrived quite close Hart muttered:

"Halt! Who comes?"

"The Desert Rangers," and they trotted and drew rein before him.

They were desperate-looking men, each dressed like Hart, each wearing the same ill-omened feather, and each dark and swarthy. They were armed, too, similarly, with carbines, pistols and long knives, and all rode fleet horses. These similarities would indicate an organized band. An organized band it was, and Captain Hart was the chief.

Five more villainous, treacherous men one would not wish to see, and one would not desire to encounter them at any place. They were bandits, cut-throats, and serving the foulest of them all, the thin-lipped Captain Hart.

Crime of horrible natures had been committed by them without discovery; men had been robbed and murdered by them in open daylight, and still the world was none the wiser; but of all their foul deeds, the one to be planned to-night was the foulest and easiest in execution.

"Well, captain, you are on time," spoke Dick the Trailer, his lieutenant. "What news from the Greaser camp?"

"Bad, bad!" replied Hart, his brows contracting in anger. "Boys, this job must be done at once, now, within three days."

"Why, what's up? Any thing gone wrong?"

"All gone wrong." And then Hart related how, when he heard from the senior the party

was lost, he resolved to assume the position of guide and take them out of their course. Then he could plunder them at will. But, as we have seen, the scout appeared in an opportune moment, and frustrated his plans.

His lieutenant interrupted him. "I thought Apache Jack was scalped and killed six months ago, up on the Colorado."

"But he was not," sulkily muttered Hart. "He is alive and kicking, curse him, but he won't be so long if I have anything to say about it," he growled, savagely.

"And I," "And I," chorused the rest. They hated him because he was a skilled and favorite scout, and minded his own business.

A gleam of pleasure lighted the countenance of Hart. So eagerly sought by so many wily foes, Apache Jack would have but a small chance of life. And the ranger was triumphant. He proceeded to unfold his plan for vengeance and gain at the same time. The men grouped themselves to listen attentively.

While they were talking, a prolonged howl came dimly from afar off. They listened. Once more it echoed over the plain, warningly and musically. Dick the Trailer stood and peered out into the moonlight. In this country the atmosphere is very dry and clear, and objects can be seen far away even in moonlight. He ascended the mound and his companions watched him eagerly.

After some time had elapsed he returned, having seen nothing.

"Well, Dick?" inquiringly spoke Hart.

"It is a long distance away," he replied. "I don't like to hear it. It is never heard but what trouble and death follow it. Do you remember when we tapped the mail on the Galveston Trail? Do you remember how that cursed bloodhound followed us howling for several days before the fight, and how, when Slippery Dick, (the mail-rider shot him you remember) was dying, he sat up on the bluff and howled like a wolf? And how when Dick died the dog showed his teeth with a growl and disappeared?"

He was gradually becoming excited, his frame trembled and his eyes flashed. His companions were accustomed to his fits of remorse, and they involuntarily shuddered as he continued:

"Do you remember how we, disguised as Apaches, waylaid an emigrant-train and murdered every soul for their money and horses? And how the dog went to Fort Landis, and with the sense of a man took the soldiers to the spot? And how we were chased and Skinny Davis was taken and strung up to a tree? And how the hound stayed by him till he was dead, and struck our trail again for more blood? He never would have followed us if you, Cap Hart, hadn't killed his master for that gold he was watching. He is after your blood and he will drink it yet. If any of us go under, this trip, just blame yourself; for that hound out there in the plain says just as plain as man, 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, blood for blood.' Curse you! Curse your black heart! you can go into the forts and live like a prince on your blood gain; while we are hunted and chased every day with a reward for our heads, dead or alive. No one but Apache Jack knows what you are, and he only keeps quiet for a better hold on you. Curse you! hear him? hear what he says?"

A long, piercing wail, full of anger and determination pealed out, a wild and plaintive cry. The conscience-stricken man listened till the last echoes died away, then cursing horribly, fell down in a fit.

His awe-stricken comrades offered no assistance, they knew it was of no avail. So they silently watched him till his struggles grew fainter, his limbs relaxed their rigidity and he became conscious. He soon recovered and took his place among the men, moody and morose.

Hart looked at the moon and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Now to business," he said. "I have no time to spare. I must be back to camp by day-break, or Apache Jack will miss me. Men, I have resolved on one final dash and then we will quit this life. What do you say?"

An inexpressive grunt was his answer, neither yes or no.

"The plan is this: the Senor Martinez is rich and fond of that girl of his. Well, if we steal her and hide her away somewhere, he will knuckle down lively to get her back."

A grunt, this time of approval, answered him.

"Now what I propose to do is this: twenty-five miles from the camp lie the Skeleton Mounds. They will reach there to-morrow night. I will fix it so they will encamp between the two tallest mounds. I want you to be there ready for business, before the moon rises, which it does at midnight."

"Be all together at some place where you can see the summit of the highest mound. An hour before moon-rise I will stand on the top, and if all is ready, I will wave my sombrero. If not, I will wave my blanket. If all is right, slip down to the foremost wagon. I will be there to give further directions. If any thing goes wrong, strike for this place. But stay. Let Jack Wade ride out in full sight of the camp, on the plain east of the mounds. That will take the guards' attention from us. Then when you see us making tracks, follow. You all understand?"

The bandits assented and Hart mounted Avalanche. This was the signal for "breaking ranks," and every ranger mounted his steed.

The chief beckoned the Trailer aside and whispered a few sentences in his ear. The lieutenant assented surlily and rejoined the band. The captain beckoned another's presence. He was the best shot in the band. To this man he whispered a word.

The ranger smiled. "I never miss," he said.

He joined his companions, and at a signal from Hart they rode away under the guidance of the Trailer to their post at Skeleton Buttes.

Hart watched them for a few moments, then turned his head toward the distant camp.

The same haunting wolves he had noticed before, again took up his trail with a doleful howl; the same coyotes slunk in the rear, and the trail was being retraced by the first group, all being present but one.

Out on his haunches on the plain sat the gaunt animal, fierce and watchful, with hair bristling and eagerly-sniffing nostrils, waiting for the solitary ranger approaching at a gallop.

While he is thus waiting, let us go back twelve months.

Thomas Burke, a private in the service at the fort, was guarding singly, on a dark night, a treasure of gold. Singly, did I say? I was wrong; a huge bloodhound, his only friend, was asleep by his side.

The night was dark and tempestuous, and in the fury of the tempest he was attacked by a band of outlaws under Hart, and overpowered.

While a dozen men held and silenced the dog, the rest made off with the spoil, leaving the soldier dying on the ground. As he gasped out his life-blood the faithful dog lay by his side, licking the gaping wounds and moaning piteously, striving in his homely, unreasoning way, to save his master.

In vain he licked and whined; his only answer was a faint caress and a muttered curse on the villain who had so cowardly taken his life. His eyes closed, his limbs relaxed, and he felt himself fast dying; but as his eyes dimmed there rose within him a fierce desire for vengeance. Mustering all his remaining strength, he whispered to the dog the old, familiar words: "Hunt them out!"

The hound at once fastened upon the trail, and stood trembling in excitement at the prospect of a chase, awaiting the command to start. All at once something in the air of his dying master caused him to return to his side and fondle tenderly the stiffening limbs. The soldier, with difficulty, wound his arms about the shaggy neck, and while the wind howled and the rain plashed, he murmured in his ear his last words on earth: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, BLOOD FOR BLOOD!"

Still the wind howled, still the rain plashed and the night grew blacker; but the soldier's face was quiet and serene, and the tender dumb beast lay encircled in the dead arms, crying like a child; the spirit had fled!

Did he understand his master's last words? It is not for us to say. But when the body of Thomas Burke had been laid in the ground, the dog took up the faint, crime-stained trail. And the soldiers shuddered as he scented along at a gallop, fast receding from sight; for in the sonorous, sad bay that pealed from his throat, something seemed to say: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, blood for blood!"

Days flew on, weeks rolled by, months paced steadily, and where the desert rangers were, there was the hound following on, his eyes fixed on the thin-lipped leader, and the Indians as they heard the long-drawn, sorrowing wail floating through the air, would draw their blankets over their heads and bow down; for death was at hand where was the bay of the bloodhound, whom they called Tangemund—the Avenger.

But to return. Hart rode at a swift gallop, never drawing rein, never looking up, but pondering deeply. Suddenly Avalanche swerved, and the ranger, off his guard, was unseated and fell to the ground.

A hoarse bay thundered out, and the ranger,

terror-stricken, saw the Tangemund flying toward him. Another minute and he would be torn to pieces, but he was used to emergencies. He whistled to his horse and fled toward him. The noble horse instantly responded, and as the Tangemund sprang with a yell of triumph at his enemy, the ranger leaped into the saddle, barely escaping, with a lacerated leg.

Neither horse nor hound carried a single instant.

Like a shaft from the bow away darted the horse, plied with whip and spur, like a beagle after a hare the dog followed, with his sonorous bay filling the air.

The pursuer was the swiftest of his race. But on the sandplains none could compare with the Avalanche. Each animal was at his highest rate of speed, and as they tore along the horse steadily left the tuneful bay in the wake, and Hart, looking over his shoulder, saw with relief that the distance was increasing. Still onward sped the horse, and still doggedly followed the hound, but steadily losing ground.

An hour passed on and the camp was at hand.

Hart reined in and turning in his saddle, long and earnestly gazed behind. The plain was deserted; but, far in the rear, coming untiringly on a steady trot was the Tangemund; with tail erect and head bent down he still scented on, surely and determinedly, and at intervals sounded his ominous note; thrice as angry, ten times more resolute than ever before.

A half-hour passed. Hart was on the outskirts of the camp, breathing his horse to disarm suspicion.

Day was faintly breaking in the east; and as the horizon gradually grew grayer and grayer, a faint sound came from the west, round and melodious; the Avenger was on the track, still coming.

Something in that tuneful sound caused the ranger's heart to sink like lead; and he rode into camp with a dim shadow hanging over him. The prophecy of his remorseful lieutenant; the narrow escape two hours ago; that ominous sound in the west, growing nearer, all seemed to whisper, "the end is coming!"

He passed into camp unchallenged but seen, and by a pair of glittering eyes; and as he stripped his tired horse and lay down in his blankets, the same eyes took in every movement.

Ever after, wherever he was; whatever he was doing, those same eyes kept strict watch; sleepless and vigilant they followed him always; glittering and gleaming, waiting for the end to come.

CHAPTER IV. WHERE IS PEDRO?

ERE the sun had risen the camp was astir. First from out the wagons crept the scout and Craver. Then came the cry of the sergeant in the absence of a drum sounding the reveille: "Turn out! turn out!"

At the sound the soldiers arose, some quickly, others slowly; loth to leave the comfortable nests under the wagons.

One a young Irishman, Sonny Daly, only grunted at the sound and turned like a seal on the other side and continued his nasal melody.

"Come, turn out!" urged the sergeant, with a slight foot-incentive. "The eagle does not linger at morn, but the rat seeks his hole at the break of day."

The Irishman leaped to his feet, scared, overwhelmed at this burst of rhetoric from the stolid sergeant.

"What?" he vociferated, in alarm; "say that again!" he demanded, with the unbounded freedom of the wild camp which levels rank to the dust.

"I was only speaking figuratively," pompously replied the sergeant.

"Ye can't do that, fur 'figures don't lie!" retorted the ready-witted Sonny.

A burst of laughter greeted this sally.

"That was a clincher, Sonny," approvingly remarked a comrade.

"That's what ye thought when the squaw pulled yer nose at the fort last fall," was the quick rejoinder.

The man disappeared amid taunts and jeers at his inglorious defeat.

"Sonny, you are as sharp as a terrier," admiringly spoke the sergeant.

"An' is it Sonny ye call me? Like son like father. If I'm a terrier, thin, be jabers! ye are a dog."

Amid roars of laughter the sergeant made his escape from the invincible logic of the Irishman.

But all the merriment ceased as the welcome cry floated out, savoring of cheer—"Grub pile."

Any one who has "roughed it" on the plains can imagine the scuffle and rush that took place.

The cook tore around like a madman outwitted, cursing the appetite of the soldiers.

Who ever saw a good-natured camp-cook? Strive as he will, it is impossible to keep the larder well-stored, and the cry is, never ceasing, "More, more!"

Every day the cook in solitude wails the same complaint of "Work, work, work! and those boys are not to be satisfied."

Breakfast was dispatched, the mules harnessed, and ere the sun was two hours high the train was in motion.

Isidore, on her prancing pony, galloped ahead. Comely in repose, she was doubly beautiful when excited, and Craver thought he had never seen aught so fair as she cantered lightly over the plain.

She was a fearless rider, having been accustomed to the saddle from infancy, and her every motion showed her to be an accomplished equestrian. She looked back and saw the lieutenant riding to join her. Her cheeks grew a trifle rosier and her heart pounded a little as he reined in by her side.

She challenged him to race. He gladly assented and away they flew, the snow-white pony, though the inferior of Craver's horse, a bit in advance. Half an hour they went along, chatting gayly until the lieutenant, on looking back, saw the train a mere speck far behind. His heart beat a trifle faster as he cried:

"Enough! I throw up the sponge."

She halted and turned quickly:

"The senor does what?"

"Throw up the sponge," he replied, gallantly.

A sweet look of perplexity clouded the fair brow.

"I do not understand," she said.

Craver reddened like a peony. "Pardon me for using such language. I mean I yield and confess myself beaten."

"Ah!" and the cloud dispersed. "Perhaps the senor has been beaten in some other way," and she gave him an arch glance and smile that at once reduced him to a state of imbecility.

"Now you have puzzled me."

She noticed his embarrassed air and smiled to herself.

"Perhaps the pretty senorita at the fort understands," she smiled.

"Who? Rosarita?"

"The same."

"A fig for Rosarita!"

"Then perhaps some golden-haired, blue-eyed northern beauty is the favored one," she persisted. "Some quiet little creature, too modest to race with a senor on the plains."

"No!" and he plucked up courage. "The one who has conquered me is dark-haired and beautiful, the best horsewoman in the South."

"Really! I wonder who it can be?" Her eyes fell, and to Craver it seemed she was deeply musing.

His heart throbbed.

"Now or never," he said to himself, then drew closer and leaned over toward her. "Shall I tell you, Isidore?" he murmured.

Isidore! How the name thrilled her. She was charmingly confused now and her face was scarlet, and her heart bounded violently. She murmured something, what, he could not tell.

"Isidore," and his face was close to hers now, "it is yourself."

He paused short. She made no answer. He went on, growing more hopeful and courageous at every step.

"Oh, Isidore. Ever since I first saw you I have loved you. Sometimes when you were distant and I thought you did not care for me, I thought I would die were you to love another. When I used to watch by your wagon at night I would have given worlds to have known you loved me. Will you tell me to-day, now, Isidore, my love?"

She lifted her radiant eyes, swimming in tears of joy, and held out her trembling hand. He seized it and covered it with passionate kisses, then the whole strong undercurrent of tenderness surged to the surface and he caught her passionately in his arms.

As the warm winds from the tropics rush to the soothing breezes from the north, so her southern tenderness and hot, passionate emotions met his.

One glad cry and she was in his arms, her lips glued to his, and their arms striving to draw the other closer, tighter. The horses involuntarily stopped and stood motionless while they overwhelmed each other with caresses.

For several minutes they remained thus, then her maidenly modesty asserted itself and she drew away, blushing scarlet.

He gazed, delighted at this proof of her innocence, and for a moment neither spoke.

She looked up again and smiled, bringing the hot blood to his face again, and he was on the eve of again embracing her when the horses suddenly snorted and reared in affright.

But that they were good riders that had been unseated. They looked up astounded.

Not ten paces distant was a mounted Indian in war-paint black as ink, bestriding a black mustang. His feathers were black; his scanty garb was of the same hue, and even his teeth were stained sable. His horse was stained from head to foot, his very hoofs being darkened.

He sat in his strange saddle, grim and motionless, without moving a muscle.

Craver sprang in front of Isidore, shielding her, and the two men confronted each other.

A minute dragged by in silence. Isidore stepped side by side with her lover. Then Craver spoke:

"Who are you?"

"The Night-Owl!" answered the savage in good Spanish.

"What do you want here?"

"I have come to guard the pale-face squaw. She is in danger."

"Danger?"

He stretched his sable arm and pointed over the plain:

"See!" he said.

They followed the direction and saw a large animal with head bent to the ground trotting toward them. He was tawny, and of prodigious size.

As they gazed, he raised his head aloft and pealed out a mournful, musical bay, then trotted on. He was on a scent.

They eyed the savage askance, strangely nervous and apprehensive. He drew erect in his saddle and retreated a step; then turned and looked over his shoulder at the maiden.

Two words he spoke, but the maiden knew them well and of old.

"The Tangemund!"

He galloped away. The hound, now quite close, saw them for the first time, and halted short.

After gazing steadily for a moment, he again dropped his huge head and snuffed along on a trot, now receding from them and following the trail of the savage.

But he followed it slowly, and apparently with no defined object but his instinct.

They watched the dark form of the savage as he sped swiftly away, erect in his saddle, never gazing behind. They watched the bloodhound as he followed, at intervals pealing out that wild, plaintive cry. Still the horseman swiftly sped on, rising and falling, gradually disappearing; still the hound followed, snuffing along; and a faint shadow of alarm came over them as they watched the strange pair; the savage, now a speck in the distance, and the hound still following, further away.

A faint shout came from behind. It was the train now quite near, and without speaking they slowly turned and awaited its approach. It came slowly on, Apache Jack in advance, mounted on a mustang, and Hart and the senor next. Then came the wagons, with the musical tinkling of bells on the harness.

They again looked over the plain. It was now deserted. The savage had disappeared, and the bloodhound had mysteriously vanished.

Apache Jack rode up, and when within speaking distance, called Craver, and the two rode to one side. The scout's face was clouded and gloomy, and the lieutenant noticing, asked:

"What is the matter?"

"I dunno. Everything is wrong. Thar's that skunk Hart got on the blind side of the old man and is wheedling him inter some cussed doings that'll bring the outfit to no good. He made the senor believe that he was mistaken 'bout the Skeleton Buttes, and the old feller thinks he's best man on airth. Then thar's Pedro gone away, no one knows whar."

"Gone away?"

"He hain't done nothing else. The other Greaser, Benny—something I dunno—"

"Benedento."

"That's it—Benny Denter. He gits up this mornin' and find his pard has gone off. So like a cussed fool he thinks he's off on a scout and never says anything about it until asked."

"Who asked him?"

"I did. I see'd airly on the start he warn't around, so I asked his pard. What do ye think the blamed fool said? He thought he'd gone off on a scout. Such a scout!" and Apache Jack laughed scornfully.

"Young feller," he continued, "it's my idee he's took French leave."

"What! deserted?"

"I don't mean nuthin' else. Ha! What's that?" he exclaimed, pointing over the plain.

"I can see nothing," returned the officer.

"Ye can't? Jest squint along this finger!"

Craver did as desired, but still saw nothing. Apache Jack glanced at him with something like contempt.

"Them's city eyes," he muttered. "I'm goin' to see what it is."

Now Craver could perceive a minute speck afar off.

"Hold!" he cried.

Apache Jack halted. Craver hurriedly related the meeting with the strange chief, suppressing nothing, but giving every minute detail. The scout stared and mused for several minutes. Craver watched him with a presentiment of evil. The scout spoke:

"Do ye know what this 'ere kentry is called?"

"Yes; the Land of Silence."

"Exactly. And the Tangemund?"

"Yes," replied the officer, perplexed as to his meaning.

"Wal, the two together make a mighty fierce team. Thar's suthin' wrong a-brewin'. Now, I'm goin' to scout after that black rascal, and I may not be back afore night, and mebbe not at all. Meanwhile you keep a sharp watch on that ranger, and don't take yer eye away from him. Now mind what I say, and keep yer eyes peeled!"

He started away at a swift gallop. The lieutenant watched him a moment, then rode after the wagons, which had passed while they were talking, and joined Isidore. She welcomed him with a sweet smile. Hart was talking with the senior, and by his energetic gestures it was evident he was earnestly discussing some matter. The soldiers were moody and silent, and Benedito ever and anon peered anxiously off in the distance. Still the train rumbled and jingled on.

Apache Jack turned the late events over in his mind, as he sped away on his mustang. He was troubled and anxious. What could the Tangemund be lurking about for?—that animal the sure precursor of death and disaster. And the black chief so strangely coming, and going no one knew whither. Who was he? And where was Pedro Felipe? It was only too plain something was wrong.

The hot sun blinked down through the gradually accumulating haze, the air felt strangely, and all was quiet in the Land of Silence.

But he still spurred on watching keenly for the reappearance of the speck in the distance. It did not appear.

Five miles away. He was now speeding by thick clusters of prickly pear, which proved a source of annoyance to the feet of the mustang. Away in the distance small h'locks, broken and sandy, arose from the plain. He was not far from Skeleton Buttes.

Ten miles away. Now the train was a mere dot in the purple distance, and he was in the hillock, dodging them right and left. Still no speck, nothing blotting the horizon. But he spurred on.

Three miles away a tall mound rose abruptly. He resolved to reconnoiter this, and he trended toward it. Now he must be wary and cautious indeed, as the Apaches were on the war-trail, and they were very crafty and bold. But he still spurred on.

When within a mile of it he looked back. The train was no longer in sight. He was alone in the wilderness.

He rode up to the mound but did not ascend it. He was too cunning and wary to do that, but he skirted it, with his rifle ready for use. Something vague and indistinct cautioned him against mounting the hill, and he observed the caution.

The mound was narrow and long, shaped like a plain fortification, and to a stranger it would seem to be the work of man. But not to him.

Under its side he trotted, still guarding against a surprise, and at length reached a point or promontory extending into the plain for some distance.

Now he must be careful. Behind that gloomy, specter-like point a score of Apaches might be gazing at him. He looked over the plain to be sure no enemies were watching him. Then he glanced at the summit.

A vulture was perched on a sand-crag, overlooking the plain. Again that vague uneasiness crept over him; and a firm foreboding arose within him that whatever it was, wherever it was festering, whenever it was coming, trouble was at hand, and the vulture, pluming himself on the sand-crag, had, with his piercing eye, seen it nearing in the future, close at hand.

He peered around the point. The plains beyond the hillside, were bare.

He turned the corner. He rode at a trot around the hill. A sound behind him drew his attention.

There, erect and motionless as a corpse, was the coal-black savage on the sable steed, looking grimly at him, but never stirring.

Apache Jack was thunderstruck. From whence had that specter-like form arisen? There was no cavity in the hill, no bush near, no sheltering rock. For a moment the scout was actually alarmed.

Then his nerve and habitual coolness came back, and in a twinkling the huge rifle was at his shoulder, bearing straight at the savage's head.

"Saint or devil, man or ghost, speak, or I'll put a hole through ye, by the Almighty, I will!"

The savage, who was armed to the teeth, threw his rifle to the ground, but never spoke. Then he calmly dismounted and advanced grimly toward the sighting scout. He drew quite close, then the scout's eyes snapped.

"Halt!" he commanded.

The figure coolly threw down his remaining weapons, a knife, tomahawk and heavy war-club. But he never spoke, his face was grim and motionless, and he still kept on.

Something told the scout not to fire, and he lowered his rifle as the form approached, and halted with unchanging countenance at an arm's length from him.

The two warriors regarded each other in silence for a moment, then the figure spoke; only two words.

The scout stared in amazement. The savage kept on in a guttural whisper, never moving a muscle.

For fully five minutes he continued in a low tone as if fearful of the ears of the vulture. Then he stalked back, gathered his weapons and remounted his horse.

Then, side by side in the blazing sun and the haze of the desert, in silence rode the two; out from the mound and into the plain; and all was quiet in the Land of Silence.

Away in the distance moved the train, stretching away, now at five hours from sunset, in sight of the Skeleton Buttes. Hart and Senor Martinez were still earnestly talking and the senior's face was smiling; he was evidently pleased. Craver and Isidore rode side by side, very close together; but in spite of this love for the fair girl by his side; in spite of her sweet smiles and loving, tender whispers, he never took his gaze from Captain Hart save to anxiously scan the distance; and Isidore was alarmed and perplexed.

Suddenly, afar off, appeared a minute blur. All eyes were at once turned toward it, and for half an hour they gazed keenly. Then as it became larger, they saw it was a horseman by the steady rise and fall.

It was the scout. An hour after he dashed in riding like the wind. Without stopping he rode at once to the lieutenant, and as the mustang panted and stamped, he cried aloud:

"Has Pedro come back?"

He had not.

The ranger darkly eyed the scout and asked:

"What have you seen?"

Apache Jack returned his gaze steadily, and the ranger's eyes fell.

"I have seen enough!" he muttered. "Where is Pedro?"

CHAPTER V.

A MYSTERY.

As the sun went down there were scattered, many miles apart, several groups on different errands, but all going toward the same place. One was out in the open plain, a band of thirty, glittering in feathers and war-paint, riding toward a chain of mounds in the south; Apaches.

The second group was the halted train at the buttes.

The third was a party of five, in high hats with black plumes, riding toward the north, also toward the train—Desert Rangers.

Away in the west was a coal-black form armed to the teeth, mounted on a sable steed, riding east; the lone savage. And afar in the east, miles distant from him and far from hearing of the train, arose a deep, tuneful, swelling bay; and the Tangemund was on the death-trail, going west.

The twilight thickened, and the outside group were nearer, moving slower, advancing on the train. From the four parts of the compass they were coming, gradually closing in, each unconscious of the other's presence. The bay was silent now, but in its stead was the pattering of swift-flying feet and the ominous sniff as the

unerring avenger galloped on. And miles away the coal-black rider, invisible in the darkness, reined in his steed near the train.

For an hour he remained thus, when from afar east rose the bay of the bloodhound.

Setting his lips in grim resolve he once more pushed on, and in a few moments was silently gazing down upon the camp from a tall mound. He had not been long there when a peculiar whistle rung out afar on the plain, very faint and musical. He dismounted, and bidding his horse kneel, lay down beside him, listening keenly.

Below him the camp lay silent, but not wholly asleep, four persons being awake. Two of these were the guards—Hicks and Day. The others were Apache Jack and Hart.

The scout lay quiet under Isidore's wagon, inwardly chuckling, yet conscious of a lurking evil at hand, while Hart was swearing and convulsively fingering his long knife-handle.

His well-laid plan had been frustrated by the suspicious scout, and now, instead of being within easy reach of the bandits, the camp was on a level plain, a hundred yards from the bluffs. But it would not have been so, had the scout been less versed in Indian lore, for with only ordinary caution he had strenuously opposed the ranger's attempts to persuade the senior to encamp between two mounds.

He had to reason strongly, however, for the old man had been so duped by the wily ranger that the scout stood low in his esteem. But reason and undeniable facts carried the day, being backed by the advice of the veterans, whose advice was given in the recollection of hard experience.

In the midst of the discussion, which was warm and rather excited, Hicks stepped forward and, saluting the scout, said:

"I've fou't Injuns a heap in my day, and I've larnt that when a force is down in a hollow they stand a mighty poor chaine. Any green-horn, and especially a cussed Injun, kin creep out and shoot plump inter us without fear of their skins. Then what show would we hev? Not the smallest ghost of one. We would be serrouned and cut to pieces in a jiffy, heving, ye see, the disadvantage of being bunched up together, while the inimy is scattered. When a force is serrouned and bunched together, it don't tek long to defeat 'em. No, sir-ee! Always keep plenty of skedaddling room in yer rear in the Injun kentry, jest whar we be to-night. That's all I've got to say."

The caution was too forcible to be disregarded, and in spite of Hart's influence with the senior, he wavered.

Apache Jack winked meaningly at Craver, who, taking the hint, whispered a word to Isidore.

"Father," said she, with her most winning smile, "do let us halt in the open plain. I am sure these brave men who have had so much experience know the best. Besides, I am afraid of those dark hills—they are so gloomy and silent. Do please, papa."

The senior never could deny his daughter her slightest wish. Smoothing Hart's ruffled feathers as much as possible, he signified his compliance, and Hart fumed like a mad bull in his disappointment. Now he would have no sheltering hill shadow in which to execute his vile scheme. For once he was despondent for the moment.

And so the train was halted, the mules were freed from the harness, and roamed and browsed round their lariat-stakes, while supper was soon prepared. During the interval, Craver and the scout minutely examined the mounds, which extended in a scattered chain toward the west, the hills at places quite far apart and small, while at others grouped and broken. The group near the camp was of the latter, consisting of seven or eight hills equally separated by a narrow ravine which divided them in half.

The tallest elevation was in the center and slightly removed from the others, very steep and narrow. The others were nearly all of the same height. Then for two miles there was level plain to the west, broken then by a similar group. And so on.

"Depend on it, young feller, thar's mischief hatchin'," declared the scout, as they stood on the highest mound looking off over the plain. "I kin feel it in my bones."

"What are your reasons?" asked Craver, with all the attention of a thorough officer.

"They're as plain as the camp, yender. Fu'stly, as old Parson Prosy used ter say every Sunday, 'Pedro's gone, the old one only knows whar.'"

"Yes, that is very strange—very strange!" the young man replied, musingly. "His mys—"

terious disappearance is something I cannot explain. It makes me feel a little apprehensive, for he was a wary, clever man, and staunch to his master. He has been away now for nearly eighteen hours, and the Apaches are on the war-trail. I'm afraid he is a lost man."

"That's what I am thinkin', too. Benedento said he started early ter do a little scoutin', and the last he see'd of him was a black dot, miles off. Now, 'twixt you an' me an' the ground-hog, it takes a right sharp man ter dodge them 'Patchies. Whew! they're a cute set—foxes and grizzlies all over. I think he got spotted and chased, and likely enough overhauled. Ef he did, it's good-by. I wish I ked hunt him up to-night, but I kain't leave things in the fix they're in now, sure."

"What fix?" earnestly demanded the young man.

"Hold yer hosses, lieutenant—hold yer hosses till I git through. Secondly: Hart warn't in camp last night at all—off on some devilish trip, I'll bet a coon-skin!"

"Was not in camp?" reiterated Craver, in surprise.

"That's what I obsarved. Thirdly—"

Craver interrupted him anxiously:

"How do you know he was not in camp?"

"Hold yer hosses, young feller! I know it, and that's enough."

Craver saw that he wanted to keep the incident to himself, and though curious, forbore further questions. Apache Jack went on:

"Thirdly: thar's a strange chap hangin' round out of reach, armed to his heels, and black as the putty gal's hair."

"The Lone Chief!" exclaimed Craver.

"The same. He means mischief, too, or he wouldn't skulk about so. Then comes lastly, but not leastly, by a durned sight. The Tangemund is prowlin' around the train."

As they stood on the summit, the sun was just setting below the level horizon. Its last slanting rays were yellow through the haze, and the sand lay hot and burning in the departing heat. The camp was unusually quiet; the distant mounds looked weird and ghostly, and all was quiet in the Land of Silence. They both felt the spirit influence, and as Apache Jack resumed, his voice sunk to a whisper.

"Young feller, I am a man. Ef I do say it, thar's none of the coward about me. But when that stealthy, creepin' beast comes about, I feel like gittin' away, fur as sure as he walks thar's a death's-head with him. You heerd him howl to-day; so did I. Young feller, you or me may never see that sun yonder again. Fur whar the Tangemund bays, thar death is, and it comes mighty sudden and unexpected. Let's go; I don't like ter talk about it. Come, young feller!"

As they slowly returned to the camp, the sun gave one last red wink and disappeared.

Streaks of gray began to float over the plain; the distant mounds looked ghostlier; afar away on the mound where the scout met the savage, the same vulture still sat and brooded. Trouble was brewing in the Land of Silence.

The groups have very materially altered their positions. The band of Indians are now close at hand, creeping silently on to surprise the camp. The melodious bay came floating on the night air.

The moon would rise in a little while. But the rangers?

They still rode northerly, but now they had drawn rein and were approaching at a slow gallop. They were drawing near the scene of the approaching abduction.

Hart lay on his blanket and cursed. Now that they were encamped on the plain the scheme must be postponed for a time. The guards were wary and watchful, and even without the aid of moonlight, could easily distinguish objects on the open plain. One of them, too, always by the lieutenant's order, stood by Isidore's wagon. To-night it was Day and he was as keen as a weasel. At the slightest intimation of evil he would discharge his musket and alarm the camp. I needed not much deliberation to prove the rashness of acting to-night, and with bitter curses, Captain Hart tossed and rolled from side to side.

But, what tormented him the most was that Isidore loved Craver. In their slightest actions it was only too apparent to him and he writhed under the thought. For now in the silence of night the truth forced itself upon him; he loved her. Although he had known her such a short time, he had, with his habitual passionate impetuosity, fallen madly in love with her—madly because of the impossibility of his ever possessing her.

He hated Craver as his successful rival; and, strange as it may seem, he hated her for loving him. Such men very often do; and their best love is first cousin to deadly hate. And this feeling gnawed him as he lay while others were sleeping, and his bold scheme now merged itself into one more daring and bad; he would kidnap the beautiful girl for herself—the ransom was nothing in comparison. He once more planned and studied and pondered deeply, and only rested when the time arrived for the giving of the signal.

He rose to his feet. It wanted about an hour to moonrise. The wagons showed faintly through the night air and the sleeping men breathed heavily. Only the guards were awake, and as they met at Isidore's wagon on their rounds, the muffled "all's well" came dimly to his ears. Craver's efficiency had spoiled his plans.

He uttered a curse as he saw the sentinels were the two best men in camp—it showed him that foul play was suspected by Craver.

He easily slipped by them and gained the shadow of the hills; then he stopped and listened. Every thing was still.

He ran on a "dog-trot" up the side of the ascent, for he was a little late. He reached the top of the first mound, but never halted, slipping down its other side and ascending the other. He was half-way up when a shadowy form brushed by him—the figure, faintly defined, of a man going in the same direction.

He stopped short in alarm and drew his knife.

Then he silently changed his position to prevent a sudden assault and listened and watched warily for some time. The figure had been visible only a second, yet he felt it was cognizant of his position and of his secret scheme. Thoughts, terrible and grim rushed through his brain, and again that overpowering sense of disaster and defeat sickened him. Things had been steadily working against him for the last day or two—he was unconsciously balked at every move. Was it the hand of destiny?

"I am glad it was not the—that accursed bloodhound," he unconsciously muttered as he warily crept toward the tall mound. "His fearful howling sickens me."

He crept on; he cautiously, and with drawn knife, felt his way up the last hill. He had nearly reached the summit when suddenly, clearly outlined against the starry sky, appeared the form of a tall savage, tufted and grim, perfectly motionless. For an instant only it remained thus, then it suddenly disappeared.

He crouched low down in alarm, undecided how to act. He was dogged. But, some way must be devised for giving the signal—he must not remain quiet. The moon would soon rise. Already the eastern horizon wore a pale glow. His natural impetuosity took possession of him and mastered him, and drawing his knife to his shoulder he freed his blanket and rushed to the summit unguardedly. Though the night was dark, still when he stood outlined against the sky and waved his blanket, the rangers below could distinguish the signal. But in his hurry he did not reflect that any lurkers could also see it, but desperately waved it high over his head.

Simultaneously he was grasped from behind and thrown violently to the ground, with his arms grasped in a vise-like gripe by powerful hands, owned by a shadowy form which bent over him holding him down.

He durst not cry out—it would be his death-knell. So he struggled silently, using all his strength in endeavoring to free himself from his shadowy enemy. But in vain.

Whoever he was, he was very powerful and active, and the ranger soon saw the utter uselessness of wasting his strength when his antagonist had all the advantage. So he desisted and lay passive, thinking by that means to delude his adversary into loosening his grasp, then he would make a final effort, and endeavor to use his knife, which he still tightly clasped.

But his adversary was not to be duped in that manner, and if anything his clutch was tighter than before. His broad knee was bent into the ranger's chest and he moved his other leg so as to place it across Hart's forehead. The ranger was pinned fast.

Up to this time neither had spoken, but now the ranger, growing furious with confinement and pain, after a few epithets, growled:

"What the d—l do you mean?"

The unseen vouchsafed no reply.

"Who are you? Let me up!"

The stranger replied in a Spanish-Indian dialect with which the ranger was familiar.

"I am Night-Owl—I will not."

"Thunder and blood! I've heard that voice somewhere."

"Have you ever heard that one yonder?"

He stopped short and the ranger could hear him drop his breath as he listened.

Afar out toward the glowing eastern horizon rose a tuneful bay, prolonged and loud.

"Do you know what that is? what it says?" demanded the stranger, fiercely, dropping his voice.

The ranger surlily remained silent.

"It is the wail of the Tangemund! It says 'death!'"

He leaped off the ranger and bounded away with the speed of an antelope. Two leaps took him, in the dense darkness, safe from the ranger's vengeance had he been disposed to pursue. But the memory of a certain deed of blood in which he had been engaged came to his mind. He had heard that same voice there.

"No; he would not pursue, but make his way back to camp. Confound it! who was he anyhow?—so strong and silent. A ghost! pshaw! no such things in the world. But it might have been the spirit of some mail-passenger, some emigrant or stock-herder—Ha! what was that?"

He stopped short in his pursuing thought and listened. Again that faint, far-distant sound came to his ears, wailing out its wild bay—the bloodhound.

He started on a swift run toward camp, fearful in his guilty conscience of being overtaken at even that impossible distance. Such is the power of conscience. He ran steadily on, forgetting in his new alarm his late foe. The moon was just peeping over the horizon when he stopped in the hill shadow to reconnoiter his entrance.

The pale light of the moon was slanting over the wagons, throwing the shadows into long and distinct relief. The sentinels were still on duty, though now Hicks stood motionless by the side of Isidore's wagon, watching and protecting its lovely burden, while Day solemnly and warily stalked on his beat. As he arrived at the opposite side of the camp from his companion, in accordance with the lieutenant's order, he droned out a low, barely audible, "All's well."

Hart was waiting until his back was turned for a stealthy run to his abandoned bed, and he heard the speech.

He spat like a cat.

"All's wrong," you mean, you villain! Curse me if I wouldn't like to cut his throat for mocking me."

Day's back was turned. He crouched low, avoiding the moonlight, and ran swiftly up a long wagon shadow.

Day turned sharply.

"Halt! who goes there?"

No answer.

He ran his eye narrowly over the encampment. Nothing in sight.

"What's up, Ben?" asked Hicks, in a low tone.

"I saw the shadow of a running man just now."

"Is that so? I thought I heard footsteps."

"Shall we give the alarm?"

"No; we'd better call the sergeant and search. There's no need of waking up the whole outfit."

Day pulled the sergeant from under his wagon, and told the incident. The sergeant fumed a little at being aroused an hour before the patrol, and stoutly affirmed that Day was a baby. But he searched the camp thoroughly, while the two men watched the outskirts closely.

Apache Jack still lay under a wagon, but he had dropped asleep. Suddenly he awoke to find a man bending over him. Immediately his instinct of evil asserted itself, and he sprang up and caught the prowler by the throat, bearing him to the ground violently.

It was the sergeant. Not recognizing his assailant, and thinking it an attempt on his life, he roared for help. The scout recognized his voice, and as Day came rushing up with clubbed musket, yelled out just in time to stay his hand:

"Hold yer hosses! Hold yer hosses! Hold 'em!"

Day lowered his musket. The scout got off the sergeant, looking very shame-faced. The sergeant arose very angry.

"What do you mean by jumping out at a man that way? Come! out with it!"

The scout's reply was cut short by an unexpected occurrence, which caused astonishment, surprise, and then dismay to them.

With a clatter and thud of hoofs, five men dashed out from the hills into the plain. The moonlight was as bright as day for quite a distance, and they could see every object plainly. They were riding at a dead run, and were spur-

ring violently, pressing their horses to greater speed. They were riding away from camp, and paid no attention to it.

Thirty seconds dragged by, and they were quite a distance away. Suddenly, from the very spot of their appearance, six times their number of Indians dashed out, helter-skelter, in pursuit. They, too, rode at their highest speed, and seemed bent upon overtaking the flying whites. And they rode clean by the camp also—never scarcely glancing at it.

Their aim seemed to be to overtake the foremost party, and they fairly flew after them.

Suddenly one drew in his mustang with a violent jerk, and when he had halted, fired.

A yell from the foremost band greeted the shot, and a horse sprung away riderless. The savages yelled hideously and spurred on. They passed the spot where the victim fell, and his slayer paused for a moment over him; he then mounted and followed on; he had scalped the prostrate victim.

For fully five-minutes did the four men watch this strange and sudden occurrence, when at last pursuer and pursued disappeared in the dim distance, leaving the faint echoes of hideous yells behind on the night-air. Then the soldiers and the scout hurriedly alarmed the camp.

Craver's first thought was of Isidore, and he rushed to the wagon in unnecessary haste. After feasting his eyes on her for a second in silence, he led her to the center of the camp where the majority were assembled. Here he left her, and detailing additional men as guards, went the rounds with them to see with his own eyes every order executed.

While he was thus engaged, and the scout was giving him some advice, he was startled at hearing a hoof-stroke behind him. Knowing no one to be mounted at that hour, he hastily turned with the scout.

Not a dozen yards distant on his sable steed sat the black rider—the Lone Chief. Just as grim and quiet as ever, he sat motionless, staring steadily before him. Craver hurriedly glanced at Apache Jack. His brave, weather-beaten face wore a strange expression of alarm and deep anxiety.

Craver drew his revolver and leveled it at the rider's head. He never stirred.

"Now by the Lord—"

Just as his hand was pressing hard the trigger the scout knocked his arm up.

"Look!" he whispered. "See what he's doing!"

The lieutenant slowly lowered his arm and watched the apparition intently as he slowly turned his horse half-way round. Then he raised his long black arm and slowly pointed to the north, south, east and west. Then wheeling again he pointed to the hills. As they looked they saw a wolf-like animal trot down the slope of a mound and move swiftly out into the plain. He made directly toward the body of the slain bandit (for the flying party were the desert rangers).

Creeping softly up to it he smelt it all over, then raised a ghostly cry—soft and low. Gradually augmenting in force, his voice rose till the air fairly shook with his mournful bays and piercing howls.

The scout shuddered—strong man as he was. The lieutenant was also alarmed: for the low whisper that flew from mouth to mouth was in two words—"The Tangemund."

Every thing was done to guard against surprise; men patrolled the camp minutely; but no more alarm came that night. The Lone Chief had disappeared as mysteriously and suddenly as he came; but through the long quiet night the bloodhound wailed, and Hart trembled; for again the Tangemund was triumphing over the body of a ranger. The morning dawned and all was quiet in the Land of Silence.

CHAPTER VI.

ISIDORE.

THE morning sun looked down upon a gloomy camp. The proceedings of the last day or two had a strong effect upon the superstitious soldiers, and the rest were subdued and silent.

The principal thing that produced this feeling was the absence of Pedro Felipe. He had been gone twenty-four hours now and no one could hope he was alive. The fierce hostility of the Apaches, their mysterious appearance the night before, and the certainty that they had discovered them, proved that they had drawn off only to strike at some more advantageous time.

Pedro was an old plainsman—he was well

versed in the science of Indian warfare for one whose whole life had been spent among the wild cattle of the plains. Notwithstanding Apache Jack's disparaging remarks, he was able to cope successfully with the savages—able to take care of himself. He was of a wily, sagacious race—he could sit for hours under a bush and never stir only to better his sight of his enemy.

He could lie beneath a bowlder in a deep canyon for days if he only had pipe and food, watching and avoiding Indians. Flying from cunning pursuers, he could travel like a dromedary and cover his trail at the same time—an invaluable quality.

But nevertheless the party, more particularly the officer, scout, and the Mexicans, considered him as lost, and though resolved on making a search for him, felt it was of no avail. Faithful, wary Pedro would never have deserted his old master—that was certain. And if he had left voluntarily he would certainly have informed the senior, as had been his custom for years. So he must have left for no good, however he went, whether kidnapped or killed. His horse, too, was absent, so he must have ridden away—undoubtedly a prisoner.

No more time than was absolutely necessary was spent in talking, but, as soon as breakfast was over it was decided that the scout should take the back track, accompanied by Benedito, fasten upon the trail, and if possible discover him or his body.

But Benedito objected to going, and he was seconded by the scout. Benedito was no coward—far from it; but he obstinately refused to go, and Apache Jack warmly agreed. He would give no reason for his strange resolution though hotly pressed by Craver, who, bold as a lion himself, abhorred timidity in others.

So Apache Jack mounted his mustang and shook hands all round amid general good wishes and cautions, at which he only smiled scornfully. He was, like all old plainsmen, conceited. With Hart, however, he refused to shake hands, merely passing him with a quiet, cynical twist of his upper lip which enraged the hot-headed ranger. He only bit his lip, however, and remained quiet. He must be wary for he was suspected, not without fear of detection.

All was ready; the mules stood awaiting the word to start, the horsemen and Isidore were already in their saddles; and Hart sat in his deep saddle covertly watching the fair girl who was wholly unconscious of his presence, having eyes and ears only for the young lieutenant.

Apache Jack rode to where the body of the dead ranger lay. It had been closely scrutinized that morning by every one in camp except Hart who kept aloof and cursed.

The man had been the best shot in the band—the one to whom he had whispered the sacred order at the midnight meeting.

Apache Jack noticed the black plume in Hart's hat, and observed one just like it in the hat of the dead ranger. He whistled softly. He had for some time suspected the existence of a band of outlaws led by Hart, and his suspicions were now strengthened.

He turned and waved his hand.

"Hold yer hosses, leftenant!" he said; "watch out and take keer of the purty gal, and this chicken 'll be back afore long ter help yer, ef she's willin'. Hold yer hosses!"

He was off on a long swinging "lope."

The train creaked and rumbled, and the bells sent out their sweet monotony of tinkles; the train moved on.

Craver sat watching the receding scout as he rose and fell, each time further away. Isidore seeing him abstracted and quiet, ventured near and lingered by. Hart rode on with the train, but still angrily and covertly watched her and the young man. The ranger was desperately in love.

The scout disappeared behind a hillock, and Craver, on sweeping the horizon on the lookout for Indians, saw the beautiful girl close by and the train far ahead. He could not repress an exclamation of delight at this proof of her devotion. He rode up to her, and kissed her, for which he received an energetic slap in the face.

"Isidore, were you waiting for me?"

She blushed scarlet and her eyes fell. He snatched another kiss and she forgot to slap this time. For a few yards they rode on in sweet silence. Then she spoke, fondly getting a little closer to him.

"Does the senior lieutenant feel alarmed about the Indians?"

"Yes. Not for my safety other than it affects you. Yes, Isidore; I think before another twenty-four hours will have elapsed, we will hear from them."

"But they are not in sight now? See, the plain is quite bare."

"Nevertheless, I believe they have at this instant their eyes upon us. They are very cunning and vindictive."

"Oh, wasn't it dreadful, last night? I was so alarmed. Who were the white men?" she suddenly asked, unconsciously lowering her voice in her earnestness.

"I can not tell," he replied, musing deeply. "It was a very strange occurrence, and I am less afraid of the Indians than the whites. I fear their presence bodes evil."

"They were not Mexicans," she said; "they were dressed like Americans."

"The body yonder is that of a half-breed, I should judge, by his appearance. He is dressed very much like Hart."

"I noticed it," and she dropped her voice to a whisper. "I am afraid of that man."

"I do not like him—he seems so snake-like and treacherous. Besides, you remember he gave us false directions about the route. It seems strange that your father should cling to him after that."

"Oh, he has completely deceived him with his smooth tongue. Father thinks he knows every thing and is upright and honorable. I don't; I am afraid of him—he watches me so."

Lieutenant Craver flushed. "Watches you?"

"Yes; angrily, sometimes, then in a way that makes me shudder, it is such a strange look. That is when he smiles; it is so unlike—unlike—"

"What? Whom?" the young man asked, softly.

She blushed. He leaned over and kissed her, tenderly.

"Whom, Isidore?"

As his stalwart arm encircled her yielding waist, a look of passionate tenderness welled up from her eyes into his.

"Yourself!" she murmured, softly.

Ah, well! the horses mechanically stopped and for a moment the bare plain seemed a paradise to these fond lovers. Who can describe such a scene.

But her modesty quickly took fright, and she crept away from him and rode on quite rapidly to overtake the train. He was delighted; twice had she rested in his arms, for a moment only, then, blushing scarlet, hurried away. He was everjoyed at this proof of her purity.

"Hurrah!" he vociferated, with all the vim and lusty manner of an ardent lover. "Hurrah!"

She turned quickly and eyed him timidly, askance, from under her long, sweeping eyelashes. Then, as she divined the cause of his enthusiasm, she blushed again and rode forward, this time at a gallop.

He quickly overtook her, and she immediately changed the subject, shyly and prettily:

"Is the senior lieutenant's mother very beautiful?"

"Why should she be beautiful?" he asked provokingly. "Because I am beautiful, eh? ha! ha!" and he laughed uproariously.

She pouted prettily: "I did not know before that men were beautiful," she said slyly, turning the tables on him.

Then adding quickly to prevent his retorting, she asked:

"What is the senior's first name? He never told me."

"Robert. At home, away up in the State of New York, they call me Rob."

"Rob!" she said, repeating it in a variety of tones to try the effect. "I don't like it. I like Robert better. It sounds sturdy and independent. I shall call you Robert, if you have no objection."

She gave him a sly glance of ill-concealed affection. Southerners can rarely hide their feelings and they rarely try to do so. Isidore, bred in her father's household, was affectionate and gentle, without that mask of reserve so frequently seen in northern latitudes. The reader will not do her the injustice of thinking her bold and forward. She was simply following her warm and tender Southern nature.

"Objection?" Robert rejoined warmly. "I shall have a decided objection to your calling me anything else than Robert, so set your sweet heart at rest!"

They were now quite close to the train, and jogged slowly on, conversing tenderly, in true lover style. Hart was still in the rear, and he had been fuming and fretting at seeing them so far behind alone. For it was perfectly evident to him, as it was to the remainder of the party, that they were lovers, and that Isidore was very fond of the handsome young man. He ground his teeth, and his fingers played about the handle

of his knife convulsively. If he thought he would gain anything by the deed, he would have murdered Craver then and there.

But he was forced to bide his time, and see her affectionate glances bestowed upon his hated rival, while he was abhorred and avoided by her, and regarded with contempt by Craver. So he rode on, just in advance of them, with ears wide open for any remark which might chance to fall. He could hear her dove-like tones replying to the pleasant voice of the young man; he could see the horse and the white pony jostling each other at every step; and to crown all he heard her say:

"I am afraid of him—he is so much like a snake."

Low, degraded as he was, still something besides foiled love caused the nerves to creep about the roots of his hair, and the hot shivers to possess the ends of his fingers.

"Snake, eh?" he snarled between his teeth. "Well, take care, my turtle-dove, that the snake does not infold and crush you yet!"

It was a diabolical threat; a threat made in the heat of an evil passion, to be executed if possible in the calm deliberation of cunning hate. But, maddened or not, he was able to execute it without the slightest scruple—such was the man.

Sergeant Dare and private Hicks, trudging along in the van, were talking earnestly and pointing fearfully over the plain toward the Buttes, which were now at some distance to the south. There, against a long, low range of mounds, a minute speck kept pace in a parallel direction with the train—sometimes disappearing for awhile, sometimes invisible for an hour or more; but always reappearing, and following on opposite the train.

It was the Tangemund. Sharper eyes than they possessed were in the train, eyes which could detect and distinguish objects where the common eye could see but a blank; but theirs were sharpened by superstitious fear.

"I tell you, Hicks, something wrong is brewing, and I for one wish we were out of this accursed Land of Silence. It is an object of evil. You remember we saw two shooting-stars last night—one following square in the track of the other. That says, death! You know me, Hicks! You know I'm no coward; but I'd give a trifle if we were out of this ugly, sleepy land. I can fight Injuns, veteran bayonet chargers, sharpshooters, anything that belongs to the earth, and not flinch; but I can't fight the devil and fate; it's no use to try, either!"

"That's so!" replied his comrade gloomily. "We are under a charm. I remember the day the two new men came to us—that scout, Apache Jack, and Hart. Sergeant, our troubles didn't begin till that day, after noon—when you saw it the first time. I was mighty surprised when you acted so, but when night came and I saw it myself, I knew what the matter was with you. Holy Moses! I could ha' sworn that it spoke! Something seemed to say—"

"Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, blood for blood!" nervously interrupted the sergeant. "That is what I seemed to hear when I saw it in my dream that afternoon. I—"

"Hullo!" interrupted his comrade, looking eagerly toward the north. "There is the scout coming like blue blazes!"

He had been seen for some time by the rest of the train, but they had been so occupied by the Tangemund they had not noticed the shout that arose on his being seen half an hour ago.

In a few moments he dashed into the group, and reining in the mustang so he reared back on his haunches, he pointed back over the plain. Several dots were to be seen afar away.

"Yer see them?" he authoritatively demanded of Senor Martinez. "Them's Injuns! Hold yer hosses!"

CHAPTER VII.

WAS IT AN ACCIDENT?

"YES," continued the scout, "them's Injuns, and mighty wicked ones, to boot. We'll hev ter stir round on our pins purty lively or we'll be in a mess."

There was very little confusion. Every man in the party with the exception of Craver was acquainted with Indian warfare, and had been in similar positions. Now the veterans, in looking for orders, glanced quite as much at the scout as they did at their proper leader. The latter observed this, and stepping aside, called out, sturdily:

"Fall in!"

The soldiers took their respective places with the orderly, on the left wing. Craver sharply glanced down the diminutive line.

"Right dress—head and eyes right—front!"

Then he stepped to the front, precisely as if he had been on parade. He was thoroughly military.

"Attention, company! I am your commander, but as you are all aware, am but indifferently versed in this style of warfare. I am charged to escort this party safely to the Colorado River. God willing, it shall be done. And to further the safety of the band, I now relinquish the supreme command of you to the worthy scout Apache Jack. You will obey him strictly, and execute no commands other than we give, unless by Senor Martinez. I have no doubt that you will cheerfully obey, and if required, fight like soldiers. What say you?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" was the hearty response.

"Very well. I am gratified to observe you so willing. Break ranks—march!"

The dark objects on the plain were nearer now, and approaching rapidly. The scout went to work speedily and with no confusion. In five minutes they were in a tolerably secure fortress, or rather pen, prepared to stoutly resist the coming savages.

The mules had been unharnessed, and the wagons drawn so as to form two semicircles, the concave sides facing each other. Then the last two wagons were placed one at each end to fill the gaps. The tongues were pointed inward, and to these the mules were tied, safe from a stampede. Thus, with the squat, low-bedded wagons, with their cap-tents all bunched snugly together, and brave men inside, the fortress was formidable.

After this had been completed, the scout stationed the men round the circle. Hart he passed over as usual; but after thinking a moment, spoke to him:

"I reckon ye'll fight?"

"What do you think about it?" growled the sullen ranger.

"I think ye know enough 'bout Injuns ter do yer sheer of the business; so I'll let yer pop away wharever and whenever yer please, as the kitten on the shed sed ter the monkey below with the squirt-gun."

"You are very obliging," sneered Hart. "I will fight or not, as I please."

The scout watched him steadily for a moment. Then his eyes snapped as he spoke:

"Cap Hart, when I war a bit younger and foolisher than I be now, I tuk the notion I war cut out fur a civilized life, and so one day undertuk ter drive stage-coach fur a livin'. When I war fixed ter start, I went ter git some advice from an old whip. The only thing he told me was—'Young feller, hold yer hosses!'"

"I laffed in his face fur tellin' me sich a foolish thing as thet."

"Wal," said he, "young feller, I've druv a stage a leetle—enough ter know better'n ter laff at a man as knows mor'n I do."

"He war r'iled, and cussed a bit, then I left him. I hedn't gone a mile when, as I war listening ter a young feller a-tellin' yarns, a hog bu'st out of a fence-corner with a snort. I warn't holdin' th' lines over-tight, and the hosses tuk a stampede and started off on the keen jump, jerkin' the lines from my paws."

"We turned a corner like mad, and run ag'in' a tree. Geewhittaker! yer'd ought ter hev seen us fellers fly off the top of thet stage as it tipped over. One old buffer hed his arm broke; another feller undertuk ter plow with his nose, and this chicken hed the wind all knocked out'n him."

"But thet warn't the worst. One young feller—the one that war a-spinnin' yarns—lit on a fence-stake and tore the breeches nigh off'n him. Thar war a lot of wimmen aboard (or rayther on the ground), and they complained ter the head boss about it."

"When I went back ter town he boosted me, and I struck west, fur the hull town war a-laffin' at me. After thet I allers held my hosses. Now, ye jest hold yourn, or thar'll be a fuss!"

The ranger growled surlily and walked slowly away. The scout returned to his duties.

While he had been talking, the savages had drawn quite close, and had halted just beyond rifle-range. They numbered thirty, and were painted black.

They were the same band that had pursued the rangers the night before. They had been unsuccessful, however, having been distanced by the superior horses of the whites.

The one scalp they had taken only added fuel to their bloodthirsty fire, and they were bent upon mischief.

Several dismounted and capered grotesquely about, making the most insulting gestures, which maddened the young Irishman, Sonny, who was very hot-headed. He broke out into a torrent

of epithets and menaces, and at length mounted one of the wagons and shook his fist at them.

A puff of white smoke was his answer, and a bullet whistled over his head, which caused him to descend hastily. Craver reproved him, and cautioned quiet and watchfulness.

The other men lay quiet, closely watching the savages, who gradually grew more demonstrative and drew cautiously near.

When they had drawn as near as they dared, they separated and galloped round the encampment, yelling and hooting hideously. When they had made the circuit several times without molestation, they gathered in a compact body and made a rush toward the camp, rending the air with their yells. Of the thirty, about one-half were armed with fire-arms—a mixed collection, the result of thefts and pillages.

"Steady—men!" said Craver, warningly.

"Hold yer hosses!" countermanded Apache Jack.

"They ain't fools! they won't come very clost. Ef they do, men, don't shoot ontill ye see the red on their pesky mugs. It's thar, but ye kaint see it yet."

The scout's prediction was verified. When they had drawn within easy range they suddenly separated like chaff in a whirlwind, and each taking a different direction, they curveted around the camp, widening their circle beyond sure range. They were all scantily clothed and in deep war-paint, and their actions showed deadly hostility.

This they continued for an hour or more, then drew off to their former position, and, grouped together, had a consultation.

Isidore had been placed in a wagon by Craver, who took his post near her. She was pale and alarmed, but the presence of her lover and father gave her courage.

She had drawn the wagon-cover aside to allow her to see and talk to her lover, and he cheered her with encouraging words.

The day wore on. The Indians dismounted, and lariatting their mustangs, walked to and fro with their characteristic cat-like tread, narrowly watching their enemy the while. They were waiting for night to aid them by its darkness.

Meanwhile the scout was not idle. In the wagons were spades, and now they were put in requisition. Putting them in use he soon had a circular trench about four feet deep close to the wagons. Into this the men descended, with their weapons ready for use. Several stakes were driven in the center of the circle formed by the trench, and to these the mules were tied, together with the saddle-horses. All was ready now, and they had only to wait for night.

It was not long in coming. The sun sunk slowly down, shining dimly through the hazy atmosphere; several coyotes appeared in sight, sneaking toward them; a vulture wheeled solemnly overhead; and the Apaches still continued their steady pace.

An hour before sundown the vultures were now a flock; the coyotes were a large body, scattered about; and the sun still shone dimly and the Apaches still continued their steady pace.

Just before the sun set, several wolves trotted near and howled dismally.

When the sun sunk below the horizon the Indians, by one impulse, walked grimly to their mustangs, mounted them, and rode slowly away toward the distant mounds.

The long shadows of the wagons disappeared; the air thickened and the sky became gray; in the twilight the last Indian had disappeared, and the night settled gloomily down; all was quiet in the Land of Silence.

"Oh, Robert! have they gone?" asked Isidore, nestling close to him.

"Yes, love—for a time; but they will return, I am afraid."

"Coorse they will!" growled the scout. "It's nigh dark now and the moon rises in four hours. I'll bet my skelp thar'll be a big scrimmage afore that time."

A grunt of assent went round among the soldiers. They were old Indian-fighters; they knew their habits.

"It makes me durnation r'iled!" grumbled Apache Jack, after half an hour of dismal silence. "It r'iles me ter see they reckon we hain't got no more sense than ter think they've left fur good. Blast 'em! I know more'n the hull lot of the rascally devils. Ef they knowed I war hyar I'll bet a river they'd jest sot down and say: 'Look a-hyar! thar's Apache Jack! thar ain't no kind o' use in tryin' ter come gum games on him. We know him.'"

Apache Jack was vain—there is no gainsaying that. But, his vanity was pardonable, for he

certainly was a first-rate scout: living years in the wilds, he had learned all the tricks of savages, and he knew it—hence his vanity.

An hour more passed away in darkness, and the men were becoming impatient, when a faint cry arose away in the north—the scream of the horned owl.

"D'ye hear that?" whispered the sergeant, nudging the scout.

"Hear it? Course I hear it! Do ye think I'm deaf?" growled Apache Jack, nettled at the question. "Thar's another in the south—an answer. Keep yer eyes and ears skinned now, all of yer!" he commanded, in a low tone.

The men drew their musket-hammers and settled themselves into favorable positions to resist a sudden attack. Isidore was seated behind Apache Jack, between Craver and the old senor. She left the latter and nestled close to the young man. He passed his arm protectingly round her.

"Courage, dear!" he whispered; "courage! we are secure here. Keep good heart! I will protect you."

"I know you will," she answered; "but still I feel alarmed at the thought if we are defeated what will become of us."

"If they take you they will do so over my dead body!" muttered the young man, with set teeth.

"Dry up!" whispered the scout. "I beg yer pardon, lady, but ef he talks he kain't fight."

Craver ceased and all was still again.

Suddenly the mules became restive, and snorted and stamped fretfully. They pulled hard on the lariats; something was wrong.

The scout crept round among the waiting soldiers and whispered advice to each one.

"Keep yer musket pointed under the wagons. That's the way they'll come—'twu'd make too much fuss to climb over the covers. Draw yer knife and keep it in yer trigger hand. They'll slip up in under the wagons, and when everything is ready each red fool'll yell; they kain't help it. When you hear a yell clost by, shoot right at it, then go in with yer knife. But don't cut any fellow that's got clothes on his shoulders! tek the naked fellers. Mind that!"

He returned to his position by Isidore with rifle and knife ready for use. Hart hated to fight in defense of the band he was working to destroy, but he was forced to do it to save his own life. He heard the lovers whisper their affectionate words, and a diabolical idea entered his head. He watched and waited.

The restlessness of the mules increased to a ferment, and they pawed the earth in wild affright. Indians were at hand.

The darkness was intense. As the besieged band anxiously waited and listened they could scarcely see one another.

The horses now became violently alarmed, and there was danger of their breaking loose.

But not another sound was heard. The men, following the scout's instructions, kept in readiness to repel the certainly approaching assault.

It came. Simultaneously bursting out upon the still, black night, arose a blood-curdling shriek—a yell as if all the demons of the infernal regions were loose.

Then came a second of silence.

Then out burst the musketry with a deafening roar which drowned the echoes of the yell.

As the guns belched their flaming contents, another wild cry went out—the cry of death: the deadly sagacity of the scout had worked with fatal effect.

Then through the dim air the whites beheld dusky forms swarming toward them, and they rushed to meet them with their knives. It had come—hand to hand.

At the first shrill yell, Craver tightly clasped Isidore, who was supported on the other side by her father. He drew his knife, and whispering courage to the fair girl, settled himself firmly to resist the attack.

A shadowy form rushed toward him, striking down a soldier as he came. It seemed to make directly toward him, and he withdrew his arm from Isidore, and placed himself in front of her and a little in advance of Senor Martinez, who stood like a veteran.

He had just time to see his approaching antagonist was a huge Apache, and that his arm was raised aloft as if with a knife, when he was upon him. As the savage sprang he slightly stumbled, and his aim was disconcerted, the knife whizzing past his ear.

Had he not stumbled the knife would have surely been buried in Craver's breast, the blow was delivered with such tremendous force.

They grappled and fell, Craver beneath.

As they fell the young man's knife arm was twisted round by the brawny savage, almost

breaking it, and he fell on it and on the knife, escaping miraculously from its keen edge. The savage released his grasp and clutched the young man by the throat—with both hands.

Craver had but one hand with which to defend himself, but he used it well and battled manfully. He was at first surprised and confused, having never before been in a hand-to-hand conflict. But when the suddenness of the first attack wore away he became maddened, enraged, and was bent on not only disabling, but killing his adversary.

His right arm and knife were useless, but he strove with his other to tear his enemy's hands from his throat. He struggled desperately, but to no purpose. The Indian was his superior in strength and skill and had the advantage of being uppermost. He felt the bony hands compress and his breath to fail; he saw, with eyes starting from their sockets, the brave senor desperately struggling with three Indians, closely pressed: he heard the profanity of the desperately-fighting veterans intermingled with the guttural accents of their red foes; and with a ringing in his ears, heard his enemy grunt in triumph, and Apache Jack's voice strangely faint and far away: "Hold yer hosses! hold—hold—hold—"

Isidore all this time had stood transfixed in horror, her hands tightly clasped. But now, seeing her lover's danger, she seemed to possess superhuman strength.

Seizing the savage by his top-knot she bore him backward and off her lover with the force of a whirlwind. As he fell backward, one of his legs, entwined in Craver's unable to endure the immense strain, snapped like a pipe-stem.

Apache Jack in the course of the combat happening near, saw at a glance the state of affairs. Dealing the savage with whom he was struggling a death-blow with his knife, he sprang upon the fallen warrior and struck. A red stream spurted from his throat, a guttural rattle sounded, his arms relaxed and his head fell back. He was dead.

By this time Craver had recovered and was now on his feet, and even at this moment supporting Isidore, who had fainted after her heroic deed. The scout stayed still for barely two seconds.

"No time fur foolin' now!" he yelled. "Dror yer knife and tek keer of the gal!"

Seeing the old senor hard pressed, he sprang with a yell on his assailants, cutting right and left. They fell back for a moment at this reinforcement, but only for a moment.

Two of the three Indians left the senor and sprang upon their more formidable and hated foe, whom they instantly recognized.

At this instant arose, close by, a piercing cry; a tuneful, swelling bay echoing above the din of the conflict.

The savages drew back, and the scout stood still. Again it rung out deep and mournful.

With a wild cry the savages turned and fled, jumping over and crawling under the wagons, and retreating as fast as they could run. The rest took up the cry and fled, darting away at full speed. The whites stood still, rooted to the ground with amazement, forgetting even to pursue. What could it mean?

The whole procedure was so instantaneous, that the defenders stood looking, now at their dimly-discernible comrades, now in the direction of the panic, wholly unable to account for it. Except two. Hart and Apache Jack well knew the cause of the rout and knew it from experience.

It was the wail of the Tangemund!

For full two minutes no one spoke. They could hear the Apaches mount their mustangs and clatter away over the plain. The bay had only sounded twice. It was now silent. The men slowly gathered together, and silently awaited another attack with their recovered guns ready.

"No use, boys!" muttered Apache Jack, in a low tone; "the devils won't kim back. They won't stop fer ten mile."

Senor Martinez addressed him. "What is the matter?"

The scout turned full upon him.

"Did yer hear a loud howl jest afore they ske-daddled? It was the Tangemund. *That's* the reason."

"Ah!" and the senor looked relieved.

"Men," muttered the scout, "tek keer! Death's prowlin' round. Who's hurt?" he called suddenly.

The men looked inquiringly round and gathered closer anxiously.

"Don't be afeard, men: the devils won't kim back. Better hev the lieutenant call the roll."

Craver stepped forward, supporting Isidore,

and called the roll. The young Irishman, Sonny, and a private by the name of Johnson, were missing. As no fears were entertained of the Apaches' return, torches were lighted and a search made.

They soon came across the body of Johnson, interlocked with that of an Indian, both mangled and gashed fearfully. They were both quite dead.

Next, the body of an Apache lay cold and grim across their path, in close proximity to two more. These were all the bodies in and around the trench.

Then they searched among the horses and mules, which, strange to say, had not stamped during the struggle. The search was fruitless.

They were returning, when a shout from the scout who had wandered away by himself, attracted their attention. It was an exclamation of surprise.

They hastened to where he was, at the further end of the corral. He stood gazing soberly upon a strange group of four, all lifeless.

The young Irishman was leaning against the wheel of the further wagon, bolt upright, with knife drawn and in his hand which hung down. At his feet, were the bodies of three Apaches—by far the most formidable warriors of the night's combat. They lay, twisted and twined about his feet and legs in such a manner as to stiffen his knees, so he remained standing as he had died. The brave lad had undoubtedly slain the trio, single-handed, and then died from the effects of his wounds, which numbered eight, nearly every one being mortal.

"Geewhittaker! it's a burnin' shame thet sech a lad died. Stood up like a grizzly and beat off their cursed hatchets with one hand, while he stabbed and slashed with t'other. Ef thar ain't grit no one never seed any. He never so much as bellered for help, either. Did any one of ye hear 'im?"

No one had—though he might have done so, and been unheard in the excitement. At any rate, he had died like a soldier.

"We'll jest bury him ter-morrer on the highest hill in the kentry!" declared the scout, reverentially. "He deserves it, thet he does. And we'll build a big heap o' rocks over him, ter show he ain't forgotten. Le's tek him away from them blasted skunks."

While they were engaged in caring for their gallant comrade's remains, Craver, who had been drawn to the spot by the noise, hastened back to where Isidore was seated by her father. Hart sat sullenly, just behind. No one had seen him in the struggle, though it was probable he had fought desperately, as when aroused he was every inch a fiend.

He sat there in a very unpleasant frame of mind, to say the least. He saw Craver welcomed and cordially thanked by the old senor, with tears in his grateful eyes; he saw the young man seat himself familiarly by the side of the beautiful girl; he saw him wind his arm about her; he saw her nestle close to him.

This last was too much. He drew his revolver, a sharp report rung out, and Craver's left arm dropped from her waist, crushed.

In his excitement, he had shot wild, and had nearly killed Isidore.

Craver sprang to his feet, with a genuine, round oath, and faced about. The soldiers rushed to the spot, headed by Apache Jack.

"Oh, he's shot! he is killed!" shrieked Isidore, as Craver reeled. She sprang and held him up, frantic.

"He did it, that snake! Oh, he is shot!" and she clung to him, all afire.

For a moment the ranger's life was in danger. He narrowly escaped being lynched by the angry soldiers. They sprang upon him and bore him to the ground, violently.

"Cut the villain's throat! hang him! somebody put a bullet through him!" resounded on all sides.

Senor Martinez hastily interfered, and, after using all his authority and arguments, the ranger was allowed to rise, but with a half-dozen weapons at his head. His face even in the darkness could be seen, white and anxious.

"Let me explain!" he demanded. "It was an accident. Let me exp ain."

"We'll give ye five minutes to pray," shouted Private Hicks.

"Shet up!" commanded Apache Jack.

"See here, men, it was all an accident. I was capping my revolver when it went off. You don't think I intended to shoot him?"

"Yes we do; we know it!" shouted the men.

"Dry up!" again commanded the scout.

"Yer are a purty feller ter let a pistol go off, ain't yer! Yer've handled weepens ter much, my lad. Yer kain't stuff thet down me. But

it's lucky fer yer that ye didn't kill him, 'kase I wouldn't give a picayune fer yer life ef yer did."

Having delivered this opinion, the scout turned to Craver, who was now recovered from the first faintness and was quite cheerful in his speech, though enraged at Hart.

The moon was just rising, and the soldiers sat down, grumbling, but still watching Hart.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RANGER'S TRIUMPH.

CRAVER sat on the edge of the trench, making wry faces as Apache Jack set his arm with a rude sort of skill. It was not badly broken, but the pain at first was intense. However, when the bullet was extracted, the arm rudely, but comfortably bound, and Isidore nursing it tenderly, he felt quite content.

The affair had turned out badly for the ranger captain. Notwithstanding his protestations of innocence, he was not believed except by the old man, who placed implicit confidence in his lightest word. He was watched, and he knew it. For certain reasons he feared to remain longer in the camp—he was resolved to leave it as soon as possible.

And he did leave it, and soon after. Fortune—that erratic, fickle goddess—smiled upon him, as she often does upon the unworthy, and he accepted it.

The moon was an hour or more high when Isidore crept behind a wagon to get a band of soft cloth she had, to use for a bandage. To do this she had to pass outside the circle of wagons and pass her hand into the wagon.

This wagon—her own—was at the furthest distant from where the party now were, and the guard was half-way round the other side.

As she crept between the wagons she heard a fretful stamp of hoofs, and saw the black horse, Avalanche, saddled and bridled, standing at will, close by. The horse was vicious, but she did not know it. Whether from carelessness or natural fearlessness, she afterward could not tell, but she ventured too close to his heels.

The animal, caring for no one besides his master, laid his sharp ears back and struck at her with his powerful leg. She was so close, it was scarcely more than a push, but it was sufficient to stun her. He struck his unshod foot full in her breast as she was bending, and hurled her against the wagon, senseless, on the outer side of the circle. He then stamped and neighed shrilly in delight.

Hart heard him, and was instantly aware something unusual had occurred. He walked toward his horse with the scout's eyes upon him. As he climbed over the wagon-tongue his horse ran to meet him, snickering. He was looking sharply at something in the wagon shadow.

He stooped and saw Isidore senseless. With his natural sagacity he instantly divined what had occurred.

"Now or never!" he whispered, with an oath.

He carefully raised her and placed her athwart the saddle, then mounted behind her. He was unseen, for the large tent of the wagon intervened.

Choosing the route that would hide him from sight the longest time, he started off on a certain stealthy, swift trot, for which Avalanche was famous.

He had receded a quarter of a mile, and was flattering himself he would not be discovered, when a loud cry rung out at the camp. He was discovered.

He now abandoned all attempt at concealment and drove the spurs into his horse. Avalanche responded willingly, and away he flew, with the insensible girl in his lap. He made directly for the mounds, several miles away. He was not much afraid of being overtaken by the camp-men, for he had a long start and Avalanche was the swiftest horse on the plains.

After the cry there was a silence—the silence of determination. But busy hands were at work behind—men who were accustomed to saddle and bridle a horse in a very few moments were already on horseback.

Benedento was the first to ride out from the barricade. Mexicans are renowned for the agility with which they saddle and mount. Then came Craver in the rear, on account of his disabled arm, his horse being saddled by the sergeant. He was in agony.

The scout's mustang had only taken a few rabbit-like leaps when Apache Jack drew in. The ranger was four hundred yards away. Very soon he would be further. He settled himself in the saddle and glanced over the ivory sights, then fired.

The bullet whistled by Benedento. The ran-

ger, far ahead, heard the report, and the next instant the ball whistled by his head.

"Devilish close, you darned rascal!" he growled. "Closer than I like. Whew! how that fellow shoots. But it's no use—no use."

The spur touched the horse's flank, and on he flew like a swallow. Isidore opened her eyes and moved, as if in pain. Then she closed them again and murmured: "Robert."

"Yes, 'Robert,'" sneered Hart. "By the time you open your eyes again, unless I am mistaken, 'Robert' will be out of sight in the rear."

But she happily remained too unconscious to hear this speech, and the ranger looked over his shoulder.

He had gained some and continued to gain, but it did not surprise him. His horse was fresh and could keep this pace for hours. In two hours his pursuers would be out of sight, behind.

And they were out of sight in less time.

Hart, nearing the hills, saw a shadowy form run from one hill to another. He instantly changed his course and rode in a more westerly direction. By this move he passed the hills half a mile distant.

As he dashed by, out from the shadow darted a score of forms on horseback, and gave chase. They were Apaches—the same band that attacked the camp. He drove in the spurs and flew on.

Suddenly the Indians halted—before they had ridden two hundred yards. Hart watched them anxiously and chirruped to Avalanche.

After remaining stationary for a few seconds, they all slunk back into the shadow.

The reason was plain. They had discovered the pursuing party, and they afforded a better opportunity for revenge.

If they sent some in pursuit of Hart, then Apache Jack's party would become wary and would be likely to elude them. If they remained still, the rear party would gallop on unsuspecting, and would run directly into them if they changed their position. So they slunk along in the shadow and waited within fifty yards of the path they supposed the pursuers would take. So Hart was allowed to go scot-free. He laughed and flew on.

Apache Jack was wrong in saying they would not halt within ten miles. Notwithstanding their superstitious horror of the Tangemund, they soon recovered their self-possession and were even then on their way back.

Thrice had the Tangemund appeared in their villages, closely followed by some destructive, contagious disease; once had he howled by their camp-fire and their chief died the next day. Several times he had been heard on the plain, and always some disaster had happened. So they regarded him as a messenger of evil and avoided him. Hence their sudden pause in the night attack.

They lay in wait and the ranger flew on, elated. Truly had fortune smiled upon him. But she is fickle—liable to veer like a weather-cock.

His fair burden lay heavily in his arms, scarcely breathing. She had been badly jarred and stunned. Not witnessing the accident, he was rather surprised at her insensibility, but was too much occupied in avoiding ambushes and getting safely away to attend to her. But he held her tightly and rode like the wind round a hill—an unpardonable act of heedlessness. For doing it he should have been way-laid and slain on the spot, even had he been a better man. It was the height of recklessness.

Instead of hugging the base he should have given it a wide berth to avoid an ambush, had there been one. As he turned the corner he looked back. The pursuers were almost opposite the ambush. In another moment he expected to hear the sounds of a strife, but instead, a sound rose on the night air which made him tremble, bold as he was. It was the wail of the Tangemund.

Now, indeed, he flew. Whites, Indians, every thing fled from his mind but that long, low, mournful wail. His spurs drew blood as he dashed on.

He need not have been so alarmed; the bloodhound was naturally slow, and Avalanche could show his heels to an ordinary grayhound. But the fear of evil; the overpowering sense of being pursued night and day by an unseen, terrible, and relentless foe, goaded him.

He had only twenty more miles to ride, then he would be reasonably safe. He rode like the wind, out from the hills and into the plain, haunted all the time by the echo of that terrible cry.

Still all was silence behind him. The expected sounds of a fight did not come. What could it

mean? Had the Tangemund again driven away the superstitious Indians? It must be so—there could be no other cause.

But he did not stop to listen and conjecture. Time was too precious; he rode on. Fleecy clouds scudded across the sky, at intervals obscuring the moon. He was glad of that; it aided his escape.

These became larger and flew faster, until the moon shone only at rare intervals.

He stopped and gazed long and earnestly behind. He had left the hillocks which stretched out from the mounds, and now stood in a bare plain.

Nothing was in sight—the pursuers were distanced and thrown off the track; he was alone with his unconscious burden.

He smiled wickedly and rode on at a slow gallop, having recovered from his temporary terror.

Just as day was breaking he rode up to a small hillock, the only one for miles around. This hillock was a strange one. It was apparently artificial and had been constructed (evidently) for a fort, ages since. He had often been there before, and was well acquainted with it.

It was about forty feet in length, by fifteen in width, and was five or six feet high, covered with small pebbles, with here and there a large flat stone.

Dismounting, he placed Isidore on the ground. She had not yet recovered. A sudden alarm seized him. Was she dead? She did not move, and her face was pallid.

Villain as he was, he loved her, and he felt sick as he stooped over her and listened. A look of relief swept over his swarthy features as he felt her heart beat gently.

Leaving her lying there, he picked up a heavy stone and dashed it against a flat rock marked with a deep dent, on the hillside. The rock disappeared and a circular opening appeared, large enough to admit the body of a large man.

He lifted Isidore gently and entered the cavity, first lowering her down. The hill was a shell; he stood in a cavity the size of a common room, faintly lighted by chinks above.

He walked fearlessly on, and squeezed himself through a narrow opening which led into a second chamber. This was quite light, small openings like badger-holes being made in the shell above. A pile of furs and blankets were in a corner. He placed her upon them, and went out. Then he climbed out, drawing the stone with him.

He seemingly forgot something, for he again descended, and reappeared with a black bottle. He fixed the stone back in its place, took a drink from the bottle, which contained brandy, threw the saddle and bridle from Avalanche, and lay down to sleep, leaving the horse to roll and watch—which he did.

Suddenly he started as the horse whimpered. Cursing himself he again entered the hill, and brought out a huge bucket of water, from which the horse drank greedily.

His mind was not easy. Twice had he forgotten that which he had never before done—his drink of brandy and water for his horse.

Then he lay down, and tossed for hours in a troubled sleep, outside the hill—the retreat of the outlaw rangers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAIL OF THE TANGEMUND.

THE pursuing party dashed on after Hart, and were nearing the hills when they noticed the Indians dash out after Hart. Almost before they had time to draw rein, the Indians, as before related, slunk back into the shadow. The wary scout instantly understood the maneuver, and branching away from the party, veered off into the plain, calling to the party to follow.

They did so, and the Indians, not knowing that they were discovered, lay still, not understanding this action. But when the whites flew by at a considerable distance, they knew they had been discovered. With a howl of rage they darted forth in pursuit. The whites heard the cry and flew on.

Hart doubled the bill a half-mile in advance, and the pursuers were losing ground. The Indians were mounted on fleet mustangs of a large breed, and skurried on, whooping and brandishing their weapons. They saw the whites gradually close in to the hill and draw near the point where Hart disappeared. They saw their horses suddenly shy and break their gallop, then tear away in different directions unmanageably. What could it mean? Was another band of savages at hand?

They yelled and hooted, still riding at a breakneck pace. Now they would have an easy

victory, as the whites were scattered and their horses unmanageable.

But they reckoned without their host. When they were rapidly drawing near the scattered band, and were yelling in anticipation of victory, a dark form sprung from the shadow directly in front of the foremost savage. It was a quadruped large and dark.

The first mustang veered suddenly aside; the second, not seeing it until almost upon it, cleared it with a fierce bound. The others sprung aside in terror. As the last mustang darted by it, the animal raised his head and howled, filling the air with his pealing, tuneful note. It was the same object that had frightened the horses of the white men, and it now leaped out at them.

The first savage, the chief, drew in, and wheeling, motioned the band to halt. They did so, and the chief then galloped off into the plain, looking uneasy. The rest followed him, totally disregarding the whites.

The Tangemund (for it was he) sat on his haunches, looking steadfastly at them. When they had gone some distance away they halted, and the chief called a council, in which he made a short, forcible speech.

"Children of the Vulture, the Great Spirit is angry at us. He has sent his messenger of the darkness to us. He is displeased. He has come to our village when the night-owl cries; he has warned us on the war-trail; he has said to the Children of the Vulture, 'The Great Spirit is displeased; return to your people.' Why should we dig up the hatchet with the Great Spirit? The Children of the Vulture will be taken from their hunting-grounds. Let the pale-faces go in peace. Hear you not the messenger of darkness, the Tangemund? He says, 'Return to your people! The Great Spirit is angry with his children.' O-kee-chow has spoken!"

The warriors looked one at the other. On the red faces the fostered superstitions of centuries back were working.

The chief turned toward the south and slowly rode away. Slowly they followed him.

The white men had disappeared; the moon was obscured by flying clouds; the air seemed teeming with evil, in the minds of the savages; they followed on.

They disappeared round the hill, riding from the war-path with a single scalp.

The Tangemund watched them out of sight; then, with a mournful wail, followed the whites. All was quiet in the Land of Silence.

Apache Jack and his companions rode on at full speed, for some time glancing anxiously back, but the savages did not round the hill. They were surprised, but kept on, the two privates talking gloomily and prophesying evil.

Benedento no longer kept the lead, but rode with the scout and Craver. The latter was nearly frantic with rage and apprehension, and all the scout's arguments and promises of Hart's capture failed to soften his passionate feelings. He knew what a villain Hart was—he had suspected it before, but now he was certain, and he feared the worst. Broken ejaculations issued from his compressed lips, and the pain in his arm had succumbed to the greater mental one.

He urged on his horse as he saw the ranger far ahead, rapidly recede. He called upon God in his agony, to strike the villain dead; he even went so far as to shoot after him with his revolver, which could not carry one-tenth of the distance.

He bestowed not a thought upon the savages behind; he had entirely forgotten them. But he kept his gaze fixed upon the ranger, away in the moonlight, and drove the spur.

The aged senor's grief was of a different kind, but in its way as deep, if not so uncontrollable. He now saw the ranger in his true light, and cursed himself for ever receiving him into the party.

As he looked forward, a deep determination arose within him—a resolve to kill the ranger at the first opportunity. Like the young man, he never thought of the savages, but kept his eyes fixed on the dim form ahead.

But, the scout heeded the Indians and kept his head continually over his shoulder. At last, afar behind, he saw the band wind out from the hills and disappear.

He knew their superstitious fear of the Tangemund, and divined the cause of their retreat. He felt easier now.

Flying clouds obscured the moon at intervals, and he was afraid the light of it would soon be dimmed. Then the ranger would certainly elude them for the time. They would have to wait until daylight and take the trail.

His fears were well grounded. Before they

had ridden five miles further, the clouds grew larger, and at length closed over the sky; the moonlight was gone.

The reason Hart could not perceive them, was this: the moon was not very high, and the hills were between it and him. Therefore he looked *against* the hills which were heavily shaded, and objects between them and him could not be distinguished. But they saw him until the moonlight faded. Then he vanished from their sight.

But they still kept on, hoping the moon would reappear. They rode for an hour, when the horses showed unmistakable signs of exhaustion. Then the scout pulled in, and dismounting, stooped close to the earth and peered intently into the distance.

Nothing was to be seen. He halted the men and advised a rest. There could be no certainty of their even following the right path by this dim light. On the hard, baked soil, the ranger left but little trail.

"It's no use goin' any further now," he said. "We mout as well shet our eyes and ride. We'd better jest all dismount and wait until mornin'. We'll lose the trail sartain ef we keep on. I wouldn't wonder a cussed bit ef we air a mile away from it now. We kain't do anything by keepin' on, so yer'd better git off and let the hosses rest a little."

"Great God!" passionately ejaculated Craver. "Shall we stand here like statues for hours when she is in danger? No! I for one will keep on."

"And git lost in less'n an hour! yer air a boy all over. Hold yer hosses; it's no use ter fret. Ye kain't do any good by acting the boy and gittin' lost."

"I will not get lost. I know the way and can follow it in this light."

"Yer never lived on the perarer much—any greeny kin see thet. Now s'posin' yer show us the way."

Craver pointed in the direction he supposed was the one.

"Wuss'n I thou't!" declared the scout. "The rascal went southwest, and yer air pointin' northwest. Geewhittaker!"

"Don't you suppose I can remember for five minutes?" demanded Craver hotly.

"An' don't yer reckon I kin?" asked the scout angrily. "See hyar boy! When ye've b'en on the plains as much as I hev—when ye've b'en around this identical kentry as much as I hev—when ye've trailed as much as I hev—when ye've—blast it! hold yer hosses."

He continued, directly:

"Leftenant, ye air a fine young man; but don't ye reckon I know what ter do? I say stop; and I will stop. Yer kin go on ef yer like, but mark my words! ye'll be at a standstill in less'n an hour. In the mornin' I'll tek the trail ef I kin find it and ketch the rat; but not a cussed bit afore, ef the moon don't shine."

He unsaddled his mustang with an air which plainly showed he meant what he said. The Mexican, Benedento, and the soldiers followed his example.

Senor Martinez looked anxious and evidently sided with Craver. He addressed Apache Jack in low, anxious tones:

"Could we not form two parties—one to follow now, and trust to fortune, while the other would wait till morning and be sure?"

"No!" shortly answered the scout.

"Can you not think of some method? If you could feel as I do, and as this unhappy young man does, I know you could discover some way to proceed. Oh, my child—my child!"

He bowed his head and groaned in his sorrow. Craver echoed the groan.

The scout's ire vanished, and his voice softened wonderfully.

"Senor Martinez," he said, "God knows I kin suffer as well as any man, and I kin respect sufferin'. Don't yer reckon ef thar war the ghost of a chance I would tek it? What I'm doin' now is fur yer own good, and not fur any whim o' mine. Jest compose yerself and reason; jest hold yer hosses and think, and ye'll soon see what's best."

He gave Benedento a meaning look; also to the soldiers. They took the hint.

Benedento affectionately put his hand on his master's knee:

"Senor, what the worthy scout says is for the best. God knows, senor, how I feel for you, how I pity the poor senorita; and He knows I would cheerfully brave death for her. I feel my blood grow hot as I talk of it, senor, but I feel the scout is right. Senor, wait. Wait until daylight. It is the only way. Then we proceed faster, more surely, and with the advantage of fresh horses. Come, senor!"

He gently drew the old gentleman from his

horse and seated him upon a saddle; he sat there, motionless with grief, while his faithful, tender-hearted servant unsaddled the horse.

"Courage, senor," he whispered. Then he spoke a few words in a low tone.

Senor Martinez sprung to his feet and gasped out:

"For God's sake! tell me it is so!"

"It is, senor."

"Thank the Lord!" and the grief-stricken gentleman wept tears of relief.

The soldiers, Hicks and Day, at length succeeded in their object of making their leader listen to reason, and he dismounted, though with a sore heart. They sat on each side of him, and casting aside their haunting, superstitious fears, endeavored to cheer him. They met with but little success.

Naturally passionate and impetuous, he now allowed his passions full sway, and they proved bad masters. He loved Isidore so fondly; he had pictured such bright and happy scenes for the future that this atrocious deed had unmanned him.

He had spoken impatiently and hotly to the scout in his wild grief at the thought of her whom he loved being in the power of such a villain; he had raved at Hart when in hot pursuit; but now, when he was obliged to lie idle while his treasure was being borne away, he fell into a stupor, the result of his recent mental agony.

A gloom rested upon the party—a deep, somber gloom. The scout moodily gazed at the dim heavens, and, notwithstanding his outward composure, was, in his heart, enraged and anxious.

He was fond of Isidore; her winning, innocent ways had taken his sturdy heart by storm; he inwardly resolved to rescue the beautiful, suffering girl from her terrible fate, and his ire rose as he impatiently waited for daylight. Sitting there, chewing his everlasting tobacco, he watched the old and the young man in pitying silence.

Once he thought he heard a distant sound, but after listening without a repetition, he supposed it a delusion, and sunk again into moody watchfulness.

Nearly an hour passed. Dawn was close at hand. The scout arose, stretched himself, and looked at his companions.

They were in the same positions—the senor with his head bowed in silence, and Benedento by his side; Craver was feverishly restless, and now and then sprung to his feet and gazed imploringly toward the eastern horizon. The soldiers watched him tenderly. They were rough men, deeply attached to him.

Looking over the horizon, the scout thought he saw an object at a distance; he peered intently and grunted; he saw something. It was coming toward him from the east. Had the savages recovered from their alarm, and setting aside their superstition, returned? It could not be possible; they could not follow a trail at night.

Grasping his rifle, he quietly watched it. It came nearer, gradually grew in size, and at last was directly opposite the camp, about two hundred yards to the north. It was a quadruped.

Was it a wolf? No; its actions were not those of the wolf tribe. A bear? No; it was too agile and its legs were too long. As the truth came upon him, he almost dropped his gun, strong man that he was. It was the Tangemund.

By nature and surroundings, the scout was superstitious, and so was every one in regard to the brute now before him. Not knowing his history, he, with the hunters and Indians of the region, regarded him in the light of an evil-bearer. It was not strange that he did.

But he shook it off, laughed at himself, and watched it. It drew near, sniffing along the trail. The sound he had heard an hour ago was its bay. Bloodhounds never bay only when on a scent. Could it be? Hurrah! he was trailing the ranger! Hurrah!

He shouted aloud in gratification. The men heard him, and thinking danger at hand, sprung to their feet.

The dog also heard him, and stopping short, eyed the camp and howled dismally.

The breeze, quite a strong one, which was blowing, had wafted the camp-scent away from him, and he was too occupied with his trail to notice it.

"Saddle up!" shouted Apache Jack. "Saddle up! Don't hold your hosses! Don't hold 'em! Let 'em rip and tear! Hooray! Saddle up!"

The scout, for the only time in his life, capered like a baboon. Clapping his saddle upon his mustang's back with a vim which caused the animal to squeal and kick spitefully, he "cinch-

ed" him tightly and sprung on his back. The rest watched him in surprise, thinking him demented.

"What're yer standin' thar like bumps on a log, fur? Saddle up!"

"What ails you, man?" inquired Hicks. "Hold—don't hold yer hosses! Saddle up! Look a-thar!"

And he pointed at the watching bloodhound. "The Tangemund!" ejaculated Benedento, crossing himself fearfully.

Hicks and Day fell back in awe.

"Yes, the Tangemund! Air yer afeard? He won't hurt yer. Kain't yer see what he's after? He's a-trailin' ther ranger; saddle up!"

At the words, Craver jumped upon his horse, and was going off without his saddle, had it not been for Hicks, who stopped him.

The saddles were on in a twinkling, although the privates and Benedento were alarmed.

Then, the scout taking the lead, they rode toward the dog. He crept toward them, growling fearfully.

"This won't do!" said Apache Jack. "We must purtend ter ride away and let him be. He'll go on arter a bit."

He wheeled and galloped away, followed by the rest, and never stopped until the hound was a dim blot away in the twilight of the dawn.

For a half-hour the hound refused to stir, being suspicious of them. At last he moved on, but not until dawn. Marking the spot where he had stood, the scout closely examined the ground. It was as he had feared—the ground was so hard and baked that the ranger had left no trail.

They must follow the hound, a tedious job, for he only moved at a trot, whereas with a fair trail to follow, the scout would have proceeded at a gallop. But there was no help for it.

Following at a long distance behind, so as not to annoy the dog, they crept on to vengeance; and all was quiet in the Land of Silence.

CHAPTER X. THE LONE CHIEF.

WHEN Isidore at length awoke to consciousness, she was dazed and bewildered. She lay on the blankets, alarmed. Where was she? What had happened?

Gradually the remembrance of the night's horrors crept back, and she arose wildly.

"Oh, I was kicked by the horse! Oh, where am I?"

No answer. By the dim light that struggled through the chinks above, she saw she was in a cavern—a place of habitation. Still, she thought she was dreaming, but she felt the dull pain in her breast where the cruel foot of the horse had struck. She recollected the accident perfectly, but after that all was dark. Where was she?

She became thoroughly frightened and shrieked aloud, not knowing whether she was the victim of a horrible nightmare or spirited away by some monster. She cried again:

"Oh, Robert! Father? where are you?"

She thought she heard voices, and cried again:

"Help! Oh, Robert! where are you?"

A stone rattled down from some unseen place, close by. Then she heard footsteps, and a sudden, brilliant light dazzled her eyes.

It was a torch, held by a man, who partially interposed his hand between it and her.

"Well, my dove; how is your sweet self this afternoon?"

"Who are you? Surely I know that voice."

"Can't you imagine, pet?"

"How dare you talk so to me? how dare you? Show your face like a man!"

The torch was raised, and beside it Isidore saw Captain Hart!

"Where am I?" she gasped, gazing at him afrighted.

"In my home—or rather dungeon."

"Dungeon! my God! how did I come here?"

"I brought you, sweet."

"You!" and she covered her face with her hands and shook with fear.

"Yes, I! and I brought you here to stay, what is more."

She shrunk back into the corner, overwhelmed with fear.

"Yes, I found you lying by a wagon, and thinking you needed a little nursing, I brought you here. You were insensible for hours. What was the matter?"

"The horse," she groaned.

"Ah! did that beast dare to kick you? Where? let me see."

He advanced, really alarmed. She started up, all the fire of her race blazing in her eyes.

Drawing her hand back, it struck something cold and hard. Her fingers instinctively clutched it. It was a gun!

"Stir another step and I fire!" she said, seizing it.

"Senorita," he said, in a respectful manner, "please listen to me. I love you madly. It was because I loved you so that I brought you here. Please do not be angry with me; I love you so I have no command over myself. Put down the gun and listen to me! I don't want to be hard with you—it would pain me to be forced to use you ill; but my life is in danger—the gun might go off any moment."

"Keep away from me and I will drop the gun, and not before. If it should kill you it is no more than you deserve, you cowardly villain."

Evidently awed or intimidated by her fierce wrath and desperate purpose, he seemed for a moment to hesitate as to the course best for him now to pursue.

"I shall do you no harm," he said, "but all the same you shall not live to become the wife of that Government spy"—saying which he retreated from before the upraised gun, going out into the next chamber, and looking out through the aperture over the plain. No one was in sight except his horse, which was browsing close by on the scanty herbage.

Seemingly reassured he returned through the opening into the other chamber. Isidore was now moaning and sobbing on the floor in the wildest grief, and the sight aroused not his pity but his anger.

"Get up!" he sternly commanded. "Look up, I say!" he cried. "I never was balked in any thing I undertook yet—"

He paused. A noise outside startled him, and going to the aperture he removed the stone and leaned half-way out, in his eagerness.

Fatal recklessness! He had only time to see a coal-black savage standing by, looking at him—that he was stained black from head to foot, that he had a club of the same hue in his hand.

He had no time to draw back; he had no time to throw up an arm in defense, for down came the club with terrific force, striking him on the side of the back of the skull, and the ranger rolled back into the cavern, senseless. The assailant dropped in after him. Assuring himself that the ranger was senseless, he walked toward the second opening which was gleaming in the torchlight. Through this he boldly went and walked up to the maiden.

Thinking Hart had returned, she again grasped the gun, when she saw the savage motionless before her. She started back in terrified surprise, and murmured:

"The Black Chief?"

"Yes, senorita, the Black Chief!"

She looked at him in amazement. Where had she heard that voice before? He spoke excellent Spanish.

He bowed one knee, lowered his head and threw aside his club.

"Pedro?"

She rushed forward in joy but stopped half-way and stood still a moment. Then she was falling, but he caught her. She had fainted.

He laid her on the blankets and moaned over her like a child—this fierce, black savage.

Producing from his side pocket a small bottle of brandy he bathed the white face gently, and forced some of the liquor into the limp mouth. In a few moments she regained consciousness, sat up and then arose, and falling upon his neck—kissed him in rapture.

"Oh, it seems too good to be true!" she murmured; "but I am not afraid now you are here, Pedro."

"You are safe now, senorita."

"Oh, Pedro, when are we going back? Take me back at once, Pedro!"

"I will, senorita. We will start now, and on the way you must tell me all about it."

"Oh, it was terrible." And she covered her face with her hands at the recollection.

"Ha!" exclaimed Pedro. "My horse outside is restless. Something is wrong."

Leaving her he walked cautiously to the aperture and peeped out.

CHAPTER XI. PEDRO EXPLAINS.

HE saw a man, a horseman, coming at a gallop; he was mounted on a black horse, and from his conical hat a black feather nodded.

At once Pedro came to the conclusion that the approaching horseman was of Hart's band.

He was not mistaken—it was the Trailer.

Halting just out of short rifle-range, he drew out his whistle and blew three short blasts and one long one. It was the notice of his approach, and the question—"Is all right?"

Now, the answer should have been a long blast, but Pedro was not aware of it.

Knowing some answer was necessary, he drew from the unconscious ranger his whistle, and returned the four blasts.

The Trailer stared suspiciously. It was the wrong answer; something must be wrong.

He was about to retreat when the head and shoulders of Hart appeared in the entrance, and his arm beckoned his approach.

On seeing this, the Trailer rode on, though surprised at the strange whistle.

He rode to his fate. The cunning Pedro, on seeing he had given the wrong answer, partially unbound the unconscious ranger and propped him in the aperture; then getting behind him, he had waved the limp arm. Then, as the bandit approached, he let the body fall and took up his carbine.

Suddenly the Trailer halted, stared suspiciously, then wheeled and drove home the spurs—he suspected something. What it was, no one ever knew, for just then a puff of white smoke came from the aperture, a sharp crack was heard, and the ranger reeled, yelled wildly, then rolled to the ground, his horse galloping away.

Pedro reloaded, then walked out into the plain; he walked warily up to the prostrate bandit to examine and relieve the body of arms and valuables, if such the rogue had possessed. Beyond a costly seal-ring, which was too small for his finger, the ranger carried nothing but ammunition. But his weapons were beautiful and rare.

The handsomest was a medium-sized dagger, of exquisite workmanship. The handle was of tiny basket-work, shielding the shaft, which was of chased gold. The blade was of finely-tempered steel and was as keen as a razor.

His pistols, or rather revolvers, were models of elegance, and were clean and well-oiled.

The rifle which hung at his shoulder was long, and, by looks, Pedro judged it would carry a third further than his own carbine.

Securing all these articles, he walked back to Isidore, who was waiting in great anxiety for him. She was much relieved when he returned, and carefully placing his prizes in a corner, said, cheerily:

"Never fear, senorita. I only halted another ranger."

"What, killed him?"

"Certainly, senorita."

"Oh, this is dreadful, this shooting."

"But, it must be done, senorita, to save more precious lives."

Then she made him tell it all. As soon as she heard the occurrence she begged him to take her back—this was such a strange, deadly country.

"I would like to stay here awhile and hunt for hidden treasure. I know there ought to be some—there always is in these hill-burrows of the desert bandits."

But she made him promise that when Hart recovered sufficiently they would return. So they sat in the flickering rays of the expiring torch and talked, the man now and then reconnoitering through a chink.

At last Hart began to move slightly; then rolled over and opened his eyes. Pedro stood over him, still as the black savage. Indeed, he would have to remain so until they reached the camp, where he had civilized clothing. The ranger was dazed, and it was some moments before he recalled his twisted and gnarled ideas, and bound them together in memory.

"Who are you?" he growled.

"The Night-Owl!"

"Curse me if I ever heard a red-skin or a black-skin, either, talk decent language before."

"Well, you hear one now."

"You are no Indian."

"Well, who said I was?"

"You are a dirty Greaser!"

"I am a Mexican—my father was a full-blooded Spaniard." And Pedro drew himself up proudly.

"Let me loose!"

Pedro laughed. The ranger, in a rage, began to swear.

Pedro's only reply was a severe kick.

"Where are you going to take me?"

"Back to camp."

"I won't go! I'll see you scalped first!"

Pedro's lip settled down over his teeth.

"We will see about that."

He walked in to where Isidore was.

"Are you ready, senorita?"

"Oh yes, yes," she replied, hastily. "Do let us leave this dreadful place."

"Come then!" And he led the way into the other chamber.

She started when she saw the ranger, securely bound on the ground, but said nothing.

After peeping out on the plain to guard against danger, Pedro lifted Hart in his arms and went out to the horses which were feeding together close by.

He placed Isidore on his own steed and left Hart on the ground. Then he went back and got his prizes. The pistols and knife he put in his belt; the gun he slung over his shoulder with his carbine. As he stood over the ranger, preparatory to lifting him into the saddle, Hart saw the weapons and instantly recognized them.

"Where did you get them?" he asked anxiously.

Pedro lifted him up and pointed to the body of the Trailer. Hart recognized it at once.

"Take me to it!" he said.

Pedro lifted him upon Avalanche and led the horse to the spot. Hart looked down and saw his right-hand man, dead at his feet. He was surprised and alarmed. He turned to Pedro.

"When did this happen?"

"When you were unconscious."

Hart turned his head away with an air of indifference.

"I never saw the man before," he said.

Pedro looked at him in contempt.

"Senorita, you wished me to relate my adventures. For the benefit of this ranger, I will do so as we ride."

Planting Hart behind the saddle he then mounted, and with the ranger bound behind him, and with Isidore mounted on his own trusty steed, galloped away.

"You see, senorita," he began his story. "one night at the fires, the ranger here, and the scout, had a quarrel. Well, after that disturbance I lay awake, thinking. It might have been several hours after, when I heard hoof-strokes, and looking out, saw a man with a black feather in his hat, ride away toward the south. I suspected mischief, for I recognized the man and had many times heard ill news of him. It was the man now behind me—Captain Hart."

"I watched him disappear; I waited in silence his return. It was daybreak when he rode into camp, and his horse was covered with foam."

"He limped as he took care of his horse, and his leggings were torn, as if by the teeth of some animal. After he finished attending to his horse, he lay down in his blankets and apparently was asleep when the sergeant roused the camp."

"I continued to watch him until the first meal was ready; then, confiding my hastily-formed plans to trusty Benedito, took some black war-paint from his wagon, and some clothing from my own, rode away, no one seeing me besides Benedito. When I had gone several miles, I hid behind a small mound, for I knew that the breakfast would soon be over, and I then would be discovered if on the naked plain. Then I examined my materials for the disguise I was to assume."

"I found I had a tuft of black feathers, a pair of leggings, an old robe and the black war-paint. Then I changed, and in an hour had blackened my clothing, my body where it showed, and my horse's hoofs."

"What was your object in staining yourself black?" asked Isidore, smiling as she beheld him in all the glory of war-paint.

"Partly to keep the Apaches from hunting me, and partly to deceive any one whom I should chance to meet. It succeeded perfectly. I watched the train until it was a mere dot in the distance, then making a circuit, hurriedly passed it and spoke to you and the young senor."

Isidore blushed, and her bosom heaved as she thought of that morning. Hart saw her, and was deeply enraged. He held his peace, however, and Pedro went on:

"As I was talking to you in my new character, I saw the form of a large animal at some distance, approaching. It was the Tangemund."

He crossed himself and went on:

"It was an excellent chance to deceive you, and I profited by it. You remember the occurrences that morning, so I will not repeat them."

"I rode away, and after some time looked back. The Tangemund was on my trail. For a moment I felt alarmed. This animal is the forerunner of evil and death. Was I doomed? I prayed not."

"Dreading the sight of him, I rapidly rode away from him, and soon had the satisfaction of finding I had left him out of sight. It was then about midday. I had brought some dried meat with me, and seeing a large mound off in the distance, rode toward it, so I could eat and think under its sheltering sides."

"After I had eaten, the hot sun made me tor-

pid, and I fell asleep. I slept, I should judge, about an hour, when I was awakened by the shrill neigh of my horse. I sprang up, thinking of Indians. On peeping over the summit, I saw a horseman several miles away, galloping toward me. I thought it was a solitary Indian, and formed my course of action immediately."

"You know the Indians here have a tradition that the ghost of one of their old chiefs rides about the plain when any calamity is about to happen to his tribe. He is stained black from head to foot, and rides a black horse. He is much feared and avoided."

"If this was an Indian, I resolved to adopt this character, and so preserve my life and perhaps drive away any Indians who might be in the vicinity. On his approaching nearer, I saw it was the scout, Apache Jack. What brought him at that place I know not, but I was not at all surprised to see him. He slackened his pace from a gallop to a trot, and finally came down to a walk."

"Here was a good opportunity to test the completeness of my disguise, and I resolved to use it. Accordingly I soon found which side of the hill he would skirt, (I knew he would not ascend it,) and then rode round to the other, keeping the hill between us. Then I rode softly up behind him, keeping in the small hollows as much as possible."

"He heard me when I had got quite close, and wheeled suddenly. When he saw me he stared in surprise for a moment; then he leveled his rifle at me. I made haste to throw down my gun and dismount, to show him I meant no mischief. Then I slowly walked toward him."

"He still kept me under his aim, to guard against surprise. After I had looked him full in the face for a moment, I felt my disguise perfect; the sharpest scout in this part of the country had not recognized me."

"I then told him who I was. He stared, astonished. Then I told him I suspected Captain Hart meant evil to the band, and I was trying to outwit him."

"You are a sneaking Greaser spy!" thundered Hart, angrily.

Pedro only smiled grimly.

"He believed me, and I told him of his midnight trip the night before. Then he told me of a certain mound where he had seen the 'Desert Rangers' several times. He gave me full directions as to its locality. Then he started back to camp to cover my absence. How well he did it I do not know for I have not seen him since."

"I think it was done very well," said Isidore, with charming innocence and simplicity. "I did not suspect any thing—neither did Robert or father. We all felt very badly; we thought you had been killed or captured by the Indians."

Pedro was delighted at this pretty and simple speech. He reached for her hand and kissed it.

He continued: "I left the scout and rode off toward the mound. It was sunset when I reached it, but I saw no one there. Then I rode west and took a circling route to where the scout said you would camp. I had not reached the hills where the camp was, when I heard voices to my right, in a southerly direction. I listened. The voices ceased. Leaving my horse in a dark gully I crept toward the place where the voices were, and almost ran into a band of armed, mounted men. From their conversation I soon learned their object was to kidnap you, sweet senorita, and place you in a bad man's power. The horsemen were 'Desert Rangers;' the man was their chief—Captain Hart."

"You are a liar!" shouted Hart, in rage. "You are a lying Greaser, spy, and curse me if I don't make you wish you never saw me!"

Pedro halted, dismounted, and taking a scarlet handkerchief from his pocket, or rather breast, stuffed it in Hart's mouth. For a moment he thought the ranger would burst a blood-vessel, he was so furious.

But Pedro calmly mounted and went on with his recital.

"When I had learned this much, I started to alarm the camp. When in a hollow I heard catlike steps approaching. A man slipped by me. I saw it was this rascal behind me. He had a blanket. I followed close behind him. He ascended to the summit of a hill and stood there a moment. Then he unfolded the blanket. The truth flashed upon me. He was going to give a signal."

"I must stop him. I sprang forward, quickly, but too late; the blanket had circled twice above his head when I grappled him. I threw him down and fell upon him. He struggled violently, but he was no match for me. After a

little, seeing it was no use to waste his strength, he lay quiet and asked me who I was."

"I told him my name was Night-Owl. Just then from out in the plain the voice of the Tangemund arose. I told him to listen. He did; then I jumped away from him and let him escape, for I could manage him better in the camp. He quickly returned to the camp and I went back toward the rangers."

"I had not got half-way when I almost ran into another band. These were Indians. I had no more than seen their shadowy forms when a sudden idea occurred to me. I felt on the ground and found a large piece of dried clay. This I hurled with all my force in the direction of the rangers. It struck, making a dull crash. Just then the moon arose from the eastern horizon. Slipping into a dark ravine I heard the Indians steal as silently as possible toward the rangers, who were, moving off in the shadow, alarmed at the noise of the missile."

"The rangers must have seen the Apaches, for they darted suddenly away at full speed. The savages followed silently. I watched them as they flew by the camp, and I saw the rangers killed and scalped."

"The next day I kept hidden, and from my hiding-place saw the Apaches lay down before the camp. I was at hand when they attacked you, and was rushing in when they fled. I followed them in among the bluffs, and it was there I saw the rascal carrying you away. I immediately started after him, but lost him, because the night turned out cloudy. However, I found you this morning, and I knocked this ruffian on the head—and here we are, miles away from camp, with nothing to eat, and the sun going down. Shall we keep on, senorita?"

"You know best, Pedro."

"Senorita, if I had only myself to take care of I would keep on. But the chances are we should get lost, and then we would be in a bad fix. Have you eaten anything to-day, senorita?"

"Nothing since last night."

"Since last night!" he echoed. "Twenty-four hour hours without food or rest! Senorita, you must be very weak."

"Not very," she said, with a cheerful smile.

"Yes, you are, senorita! I can see it in your face. Fool! to come away from the cavern without food."

He searched all over himself for a bit of dried meat, but could not find it. Then he ungagged Hart and asked if he had any.

He could not speak. The gag had been large and tight, and his tongue refused to act. Seeing this Pedro felt in his pockets, and to his great joy found a small piece of dried meat. It was hard and gristly, but he gave it to Isidore.

She nibbled prettily at the tough morsel with her dainty teeth, and Pedro watched her affectionately, when he was startled by a suppressed exclamation of joy from his prisoner's lips.

Away in the distance could be seen a group of tiny objects dimly visible in the range of the setting sun. They were men—no animals roamed that barren plain.

Hart in his triumph could not contain himself, but now recklessly cried:

"You know what they are?"

"Indians, I think," answered Pedro.

"Never," chuckled the ranger. "I can tell them as far as I can see them. They are the Desert Rangers."

Pedro was in his saddle in a twinkling.

"Come, senorita! follow me and keep close!"

He dashed the spurs into Avalanche's limbs, and they darted away.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE TANGEMUND.

THE day was just breaking when Apache Jack's party started on after the bloodhound, who steadily trotted on far in advance.

After going for some time on a slow trot, Craver's patience gave way. He was suffering severe pain from his arm, and this, added to his mental pain, was unbearable. He burst out reproachfully:

"I don't see why we should crawl along at this snail's pace when it is broad daylight!"

"Thar! he's busted out again. Now we'll hev trouble with him all day long."

Private Hicks, to whom this remark was addressed, shook his head sagaciously.

"Wal, you see, he's up over his head in love, and it's nateral—it's nateral."

"Nateral!" retorted the scout, scornfully.

"Jest take a look at the gal's father, will ye?—the old senor. Now I'll bet a coon-skin he thinks and feels as bad about it as the young feller, and he don't make half the fuss."

"Wal, I've only one thing ter say about it,

and that is, if our lieutenant catches that ranger he's a dead man in two minutes. He's like a tiger when he gets hot." And Hicks again wagged his head knowingly.

"He's a fine young feller. But, he's a boy yet—he hain't larnt ter hold his hosses."

Thus the day wore on in its sad monotony, and the afternoon brought them to the edge of a vast expanse which was actually barren and level—not a blade of herbage nor the slightest hillock to relieve the endless monotony.

It was here that the dog, who was far in advance, suddenly stopped and faced round at right-angles like a pointer. They halted and earnestly watched him. He remained faced thus for only a moment, when a long, tuneful bay sounded out and he ran off at a gallop.

"Foller the dog!" ordered Apache Jack, himself off at a "dead run." The rest followed helter-skelter.

"Foller the dog! the cut-throat ain't fur off! Hooray!"

Again the dog ahead bayed at his full bent and then pattered on. No longer was his head to the ground, but up in the air, like that of a pointer "drawing" over meadow grass. He scented something off at a distance. He was galloping wildly.

"Great Jupiter!" cheerily sung Day. "I've seen bloodhounds, but never a one act like this afore. Heavens! what a scent thar must be ahead. Hooray!"

"Bo-o-ow!" The cry had changed. No longer was it sad and mournful, but ringing out its wild peal of approaching triumph.

They rode like the wind, excited and wild. They were nearing something, they knew not what, but any thing was a relief from this depressing monotony.

Suddenly the scout fairly yelled: "Thar he is!" and pointed to the southern horizon.

The beams of the setting sun were like broad machine-bands; stretching down from the zenith to the setting orb. They shone upon the southern plain and lit it up with a ghostly grandeur; and far down against one red beam were two objects, dim and indistinct.

The objects were Pedro's party; and they were at a standstill. Isidore's horse, as they fled from the coming party, whom they supposed to be Hart's band, had stumbled and fallen, throwing his beautiful rider many feet in advance. She arose unhurt, but the noble animal was unable to rise—he had broken a leg.

Pedro, as soon as he discovered this, though mourning for the loss of his favorite steed, hastily pulled the swearing ranger off his horse and placed Isidore in the saddle. Then, leaving the ranger bound on the sand, he prepared to continue his flight.

But, here arose an unlooked-for obstacle. Avalanche refused to carry double. As long as Hart was upon his back he would submit to anything, but, when he was off, he was as balky and as stubborn as a mule.

When Pedro sprang up beside Isidore, he kicked frantically, and then began to rear. Isidore was jolted from her seat, and as she fell, the girth broke and Pedro came down too.

Hart sat on the ground, chuckling at Pedro's baffled efforts.

Pedro turned to Isidore with an anxious, affectionate expression on his honest face.

"Senorita, mount the horse and fly! Keep east, and you may yet escape."

He lifted her into the saddle, but she struggled and entreated him to set her down. Surprised and indignant, he did so. Then she put her hands on his shoulders.

"Pedro, my old, my faithful friend! Can you for a moment think I would desert you? No! I will stay by you."

"But, senorita, think of your gray-haired father—he loves you dearly, senorita. And the young officer, too—think of what he would suffer if anything should happen to you. Go, senorita, and may the Holy Mother keep you!"

She hesitated, wavering between her love and her sense of right. But love carried the day, as it does always, and he placed her in the saddle, then, with averted face, waved her a farewell, and drove his knife into the horse's shoulder.

He did this so cunningly he scarcely drew blood, and did not injure the horse in the least, though causing him severe pain. But the animal refused to leave his master.

Pedro swore. Then he used every means in his power to induce the stubborn beast to move; but it was of no use; he would not start.

The approaching band was close at hand now, and Hart openly grinned. Pedro savagely turned upon him:

"You laugh, do you? Well, when those rob-

bers charge on me, do you know what I am resolved to do? I will sheathe my knife in your heart at the first shot!"

Hart turned pale; he knew Pedro of old; he knew he would do what he said.

The coming band was quite distinct now, and Pedro counted six.

The revolvers shot five times each without reloading; the rifle and the carbine, once. Twelve shots in all. He must work with cool, steady nerve, yet with lightning rapidity, to pick off six men coming at a fierce gallop, from the time they arrived within rifle-range.

Isidore touched him on the shoulder.

"Let me hold the revolvers," she said.

"I can shoot! See, my hand is steady."

She held it out. It never shook nor wavered. At that moment he worshiped her. He gave her his weapons, and said, in a low tone:

"Don't fire until you can see the butts of their revolvers; then keep cool!"

They braced themselves and waited. The horsemen came rapidly on, strangely silent. Hart stared. They drew close. Pedro leveled his rifle at the foremost—a lithe, active fellow, on a large horse.

Hart groaned. Pedro aimed carefully. Isidore, with a loud cry, struck up his arm as he pulled the trigger, and the bullet flew toward the sky. He turned on her in amazement.

She left him and ran swiftly to meet them; he thought her demented, then rushed forward to shield her.

At that instant arose a cry he well knew, and he stopped short. A huge, mighty man, on a mustang, suddenly put on a "spurt," and shot ahead of the rest.

"Hooray!" he yelled. "Don't tech the Injun—hold yer hosses—hooray!"

Accustomed to obey at all times, the soldiers turned aside and shot by like rockets, followed by the old senor and Benedento. Craver drew his horse in so sharply, he fell back on his haunches, and then sprang to the ground.

She was waiting for him. Before the others had drawn in their horses he had clasped her in his arms.

"Robert!"

"Isidore!"

To attempt the description of such a scene would be to attempt an impossibility. While she is locked in his arms, while the aged senor is hurrying toward them, let us glance at the rest, and leave this sacred scene.

Pedro was overwhelmed with honest and cordial greetings. They crowded about him, shaking hands, twitching him from side to side.

"Wal, by the Eternal! this beats the cock-robin!" vociferated Day, at the top of his voice. "It does, by the Eternal!"

"Yer blasted red-skin!" cheerily shouted the scout; "blast me ef yer hain't played this air thing well!" and he shook his hand vigorously.

The horses were allowed to roam at will while the joyful greetings were being interchanged, and Hart was left unnoticed.

He sat yet upon the sand, unable to stir, a prey to the most harrowing reflections.

As he gloomily gazed round him, an object upon the plain drew his attention. The moment his eyes rested upon it, he recognized it. It was coming directly toward him, in a swift gallop. He knew too well its deadly purpose—that it was his blood which the fierce brute hungered for. It was the Tangemund, who had fallen behind in the race.

"Help! help!" he cried; "help!"

All eyes were instantly turned toward him. He was writhing upon the ground. The quick eye of the scout, always taking in a situation at a glance, saw the hound almost in the act of darting at the ranger.

"The dog! the Tangemund! keep him off!" Apache Jack shouted, and sprang in front of the outlaw ranger. Pedro and Day were by his side in a moment, with clubbed guns.

The beast came on, frothing at the mouth, but stopped and hesitated. His angry eyes shone redly in the twilight; deep, ominous growls came from his massive throat; his jaws snapped menacingly, as he circled round and round the men who guarded the ranger.

At last, finding the ranger was for the present secure from his vengeance, the hound sullenly retreated and camped down on his haunches, several hundred yards away.

They were forced to spend the night on the spot, as they could not return by moonlight over the trackless plain.

When they set forth the next morning for the camp, Isidore and Robert fell behind, and rode together. Now she was with him again, he

could not leave her side, and she was nothing loth to his presence.

Hart was strongly guarded, and when the party reached the camp, amid the heartfelt congratulations and greetings of the remaining soldiers, he alone was regarded with anger. He was doomed.

Little more remains to be told. The old senor returned to his beloved hacienda, just in time to save it from the hammer. Then he settled down there with his charming daughter, to spend the remainder of his days in peace. Soon after, the young officer obtained a furlough and visited them, and at length returned happier—a married man. The old gentleman, on condition the officer would leave the service, presented the happy couple with a handsomely stocked ranch, on which they now reside. In the delicious summer evenings they sit in the pleasant shrubbery, watching their joyful children gamboling about, and talk over the exciting scenes, which they underwent in the Land of Silence. May they rest in peace.

Pedro and Benedento pass their time equally between the two residences, and are the same faithful, trusty servants.

Sergeant Dare and his brave little band are fighting no longer. During an Indian outbreak, they were hemmed in on the open plain, and massacred, dying like heroes.

Of the Desert Rangers nothing was ever heard, and it was supposed that they had fallen a prey to the hordes of savages which then infested the country. It was a small loss to the world.

Apache Jack still enjoys the reputation of being the best and ablest scout on the frontier. Although in our story he played a secondary part, he had no other—as the ablest men are frequently served. He is the same good-natured though blunt man; and once a year he goes to see the "purty gal," and he is always welcomed cordially.

One afternoon at sunset, there stood on the brink of a yawning canyon on the Colorado River, three men—Apache Jack, Pedro and the ranger captain.

The latter was securely bound, and his face was pale and gleaming with despair—he was to shot. He was on the brink of the gulf.

His two executioners were facing him, and their faces were stern and grim: no relenting light shone in their eyes—they were determined.

Pedro addressed the doomed man:

"Have you anything to say?"

The ranger's lips moved, but no sound issued from them. The ranger was conscience-stricken and paralyzed by despair.

"Very well. You see that lone tree just at hand? Well, every night at sunset, the top of it gleams like gold for a moment. When that gleam dies away you will be a dead man. The sun sets very soon; make your peace above."

They folded their arms and watched the stupefied robber in silence. If the ranger had not been blind with guilty fear, he would have seen a tawny hound creeping toward him from behind the others' backs. But he did not, and the terrible hound stole on, with gleaming eyes fixed upon his prey.

Slowly the sun sunk to the rim of the horizon; slowly the hound crept on.

A faint gleam overspread the treetop. Apache Jack raised his rifle.

The gleam grew brilliant, then gradually faded. The sun sunk from sight. Pedro lifted his arm and said in a low tone:

"May your soul rest in peace!"

Apache Jack fired, but too late. Just as the last word died from Pedro's lips, the hound sprang forward and fastened upon the ranger's throat. He saw him leap, and shrieked in anguish. Then the smoke hid the rest.

When it cleared away, neither man nor hound was in sight. They looked at each other quietly for a moment, then creeping to the brink of the chasm, looked over.

Far below lay the mangled and lifeless remains of the ranger, crushed on the rocky riverbed. The dog, badly mangled, lay near.

As they looked, he arose and feebly dragged his crushed body to that of the ranger.

The whistling breeze below seemed to whisper in the minds of the two men: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, blood for blood."

The dog placed one foot on the dead ranger's throat; then, as he sunk to the earth forever, he gave a long, long cry.

Peeling up from the depths below, rising out of the chasm and swelling over the place, ringing out its wild, triumphant note, came to their ears the last, victorious wail of the Tangemund!

THE END

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